

**BC Skills Force Initiative  
June 16, 2005  
Nanaimo, BC**

**AGENDA**

1. Introduction of facilitators Paul Wiest & Ron Trepanier
2. Introduced the BC Skills Force Initiative
3. Introduction of participants
4. Overview of project
5. Background research
6. Focus Group discussion
7. Next steps
8. Wrap up

## Comments and Discussion

### Employer Labour Needs

- Seventy-five percent of employers present are looking to fill vacant positions
- There is a need for highly skilled people
- Currently looking for:
  - o machinists
  - o roofers
  - o powder coating
  - o skilled painters
  - o qualified graphic design people
- Businesses are experiencing a long-term issue of difficulty finding employees
- Some employers are also looking for entry level staff
- There are opportunities being lost to countries such as China
- Companies buying low-tech items that would have been produced domestically now are outsourcing to other companies offshore that can do it for a lower cost
- Focus on high-end work that requires skilled labour

### Skills and Education

- Skill set of current labour pool does not meet the needs of employers
- There is a need to conduct a significant amount of in-house training
- Employers believe it is a necessity to train people
- Some businesses have a full-time trainer dedicated to working with new employees
- There is a need for special trades. For example, there should be two levels for an electrician: basic and specialized
- Barrier exists in the education system where the focus is on academics rather than basic skills
- Too much focus on academics rather than vocational
- Basic life skills are lacking from high school students
- There needs to be short-term versus long-term career path training
- We should split them up between short-term training and the medium or long-term training
- Access to other types of training should be available rather than just preparation for university
- First Nations style of training programs are very effective
- Closer relationships between employers, universities and technical schools are needed

- Employers are more than willing to participate in school and college co-op programs
- University Co-op training works well - not enough of it
- Lack of partnership between education and business
- Education system needs to have an appreciation for "bottom-line" economics of business
- Apprenticeship programs
  - o represent a big commitment by employer
  - o need for closer schooling for apprentices
  - o issue of workers leaving once they get their trade
  - o there is a lack of larger employers offering apprenticeship training
- There should be a tax credit for employee training programs
- Example of research and development training for research; employer receives a 40% tax credit
- Acquiring new skills for employees, business should get a tax credit

### Attitudes

- When hiring entry level staff, the majority of employers hire based mainly on attitude
- Training standards at the university level lack practical skills
- When university students graduate they only have basic skills. They still need to be trained
- There is a disconnect between university graduates' expectations and the reality of what employment opportunities are available
- Expectation levels of university graduates not in keeping with their skill level; they have skills for entry level positions and expect senior management positions
- Employees of European origin tend to have better training
- Employees need a sense of security. Training gives the perception of stability with larger companies, whereas smaller businesses often do not have formal training programs
- There is a push from parents to pursue an academic track when there are opportunities in the trades
- There is an initiative at Malaspina College to promote trades in school and work with industry

### Infrastructure

- Barriers exist for under-employed people. They do not have the access that a person on Employment Insurance has
- Trades schools are not that accessible for the local community. People have to go to Vancouver rather than being able to access training locally
- WCB issues with hiring younger workforce. System penalizes company with higher premiums - built in bias within the system

- Strict government policy forcing training for safety even when you have hired a skilled person
- WCB has a lack of acceptance of training credentials that a new employee may already possess
- Need flexibility re: training standards

### **Hiring Practices/HR Strategies**

- Less than fifty percent of the employers have a formal human resources strategy
- There are a variety of different approaches taken by employers with respect to their human resources strategy
- Urban centres can offer more compensation, thus attracting the younger workers
- Rural areas attract older workers - usually for lifestyle choices
- Rural communities have the added challenge when attracting employees of having to find the employee's spouse a job
- Compensation Issues
  - o Employee benefits are usually not as good with small businesses
  - o Small businesses find it hard to compete for skilled people
  - o It is difficult to match wages of bigger union shops
  - o Cheaper cost of living in rural areas is an advantage
  - o Having a career plan within the company is a valuable attraction
- What about other compensation methods?
  - o some businesses have employee-share-ownership programs
  - o examples of providing class E shares for employees in business
  - o if employees own a share in the business, they have a sense of loyalty and commitment
  - o employee-share-ownership is not as effective with younger workers

### **Succession Planning**

- Older Workforce issue
  - o This is big issue for most attending participants
  - o Most have no formal plan for addressing replacement of older workers
  - o Many have offered special benefits packages to retain older workers
- Group discussed immigration as a potential strategy for replacing workers
- Highly skilled immigrants are great employees as they have the skills to train younger less skilled workers
- Smaller communities lack cultural amenities to attract immigrants to rural areas
- Immigrant Sponsorship programs: federal programs have too many limitations. They are hard for business to access

- Too slow/targeted to certain nationalities
- Provincial program was better, less bureaucratic
- Rural communities need to build on assets they have when looking at immigration
- Communities can target immigrants from those regions where there is already representation of them in the community
- Most business owners do not have a owner succession plan in place
  - o employers seem okay with working longer - "freedom 85"
  - o many are creating a living retirement within their business
  - o need exists for them to develop an exit strategy
  - o potential consolidation of businesses may occur as owners retire

### **Final Comments**

- Chamber of Commerce needs to offer an expanded benefits package. They need to enhance the current program
- Media campaign is needed to give glamour to a career in the trades
- Need for increased worker training to be more available at the local level in smaller communities - such as work-site safety, small tools; same as food safe concept
- Offer entry level, intermediate level, supervisory training
- Develop role models of apprentices who have made it good - to promote trades careers among younger workers
- Life-skills training for youth is desperately needed
- Business owners should be invited to present their view of the working world in schools
- Provide businesses with tax credits for training