

**BC Skills Gap Initiative
May 19, 2005
Sechelt, BC**

AGENDA

1. Introduction of Facilitators Paul Wiest & Ron Trepanier
2. Introduced the BC Skills Gap Initiative
3. Introduction of Participants
4. Overview of project
5. Background Research
6. Focus Group Discussion
7. Next steps
8. Wrap Up

Comments & Discussion

Employer Needs:

- Current need for heavy equipment operators, truck drivers, marine mechanics
- Construction trades workers
 - o drywallers, framers, plumbers, electricians
- Seasonal workers are needed for the hospitality sector (there is a high demand for summer workers)
- There is a reliance on summer students (high school and university) to fill summer positions within the hospitality sector
- Demand for technically skilled workers (engineers, computer technicians)
- Need for early childhood workers
- A number of employers expressed the need for a “general handyman”
- Entry level workers are needed to do heavy physical work
- Pay scale for some jobs is not competitive with other industries or regions (i.e. retail/service)
- Employers find it difficult to fill short-term work when full-time positions are plentiful
- Issue of cyclical industries is problematic; workers are needed during boom periods but ability to keep skilled workers during slower times is a real problem with many businesses

Skills & Education:

- Need for local apprenticeship programs
- Many workers lack basic skills such as problem solving, math, literacy, letter writing and email correspondence
- Employers also need to raise their level of skills - both technical (i.e. computer) and human resource management
- Schools don't promote the idea that many students will end up creating their own business
- Schools don't adequately prepare students for the idea of working in a small business
- Employers are not taking advantage of training programs
- There is a lack of support for programs such as the Super Host Program
- Workers need customer service skills

- Schools should focus more on soft skills training (i.e. life skills, “people” skills)
- Employers need to develop better coaching skills
- Teaching employees how to learn
- Constant change means having to manage one’s own learning. Workers need to understand the importance of:
 - o Teaching yourself how to learn
 - o Learning to learn
 - o Life-long learning
- Need to start entrepreneurial training at the elementary school level through to grade 12
- Broaden the medium for learning
 - o On-line
 - o Conferences
- Schools need to revisit the CAP program, with more of a business focus
- Need to impart more practical business planning skills in the schools
- Need to deliver Junior Achievement programming in the schools
- Many employers lack proper training programs within their business
- Employers share the responsibility for employee skills development

Infrastructure:

- There is a lack of affordable housing for workers - prices for housing are being driven up by migration from the urban areas
- Cost of living is starting to push wages beyond what certain businesses can reasonably afford. Example given is of Whistler - where employees can’t afford to live in Whistler.

Attitudes:

- Lack of motivation and/or work ethic is prevalent among many high school and university students - particularly in seasonal occupations
- Sechelt’s proximity to Vancouver makes it difficult to retain skilled employees (it is difficult competing with urban wage levels)
- Employers find it difficult finding motivated workers - (i.e., many workers want the summer off)
- There is a lack of empowerment on the part of employers (i.e., they find it difficult to allow employees to make decisions)

- Skilled workers know their value in the workforce and they often set lifestyle ahead of work. Because of the current labour shortage, they can demand flexibility from employers (such as work schedule, time off, etc.). Employers need to accommodate this.
- Both employees and employers need to embrace the notion of “life-long learning”
- Employees today have a lack of business loyalty
- Loyalty is a two sided issue; there is a need for commitment from the employers as well as employees
- Employers need to be clear about what they want from their employees

Hiring Practices/HR Strategies

- Many employers are forced to recruit from outside the area
- The Sunshine Coast is able to attract people to the area, and has a competitive advantage over other communities
- Issue of families needing dual income poses additional challenges; employers often have to help find a job for the spouse to attract a skilled employee to the area
- Effort is needed to match seasonal winter positions with seasonal summer positions
- Many employers lack human resource management plans to recruit and retain employees
- Lack of career planning or succession planning for employees
- Small business owners need to look at succession planning with the idea that an employee might take over ownership of the business
- Raise awareness by employer to attract the right match for their business
- Need to raise the skills of employers to increase their capacity to:
 - o Develop human resource management strategies
 - o Introduce innovative compensation packages
 - o Offer suitable benefit programs and job flexibility
- Employers need to change their mind-set about older workers by allowing more flexibility in the work schedule (i.e. shorter work weeks, flexible hours)
- There is resistance to hiring older workers (some may be concerned that the older worker may know more than the employer)

Succession Planning:

- Small businesses often don't offer an attractive career path for employees
- Employers need to recognize that key staff may be potential purchasers of their business
- There is generally a lack of career planning in small businesses
- Develop employees to take over the business
- Businesses have a select few, if any, key employees who can take over the business
- There is generally a lack of succession planning in small businesses
- Many small business owners accept the fact that they will need to work longer and continue operating their business longer
- Small business owners need to set realistic values for their business - they often tend to over-value their business

Final Comments

- Employers feel there is a need for more entrepreneurial-type training in schools rather than simply training students for "traditional" big business jobs
- There needs to be more effective dialogue between our school system and the business community
- Creativity is required on the part of small business for both succession planning and on-the-job training