

Getting Through the Door

How to market
Workplace Essential Skills training
to employers



A guide for practitioners



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This guide was created to help WES practitioners market Workplace Essential Skills training to employers. It was developed for the WorkUp! project along with a package of materials to present to an employer.

We hope this work helps to promote Workplace Essential Skills training.

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The word "Canada" is written in a large, black, serif font. A small Canadian flag is positioned above the letter 'a'.

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Introduction

The world of work continues to change faster than ever. Employers have a difficult time keeping up with the workplace training solutions to match the rate of change. The gap becomes wider, and deeper, and solutions seem ever more difficult to grasp. It's time to think differently about what a “training solution” means.

It is helpful to think about today's economy as a knowledge-based economy; that is, the problem is bigger than simply finding a training solution for a training gap. Employers need to start thinking about filling the gap that change creates in terms of making workplace learning an ongoing, core business strategy. Workplace training is indispensable to economic survival. This is where Workplace Essential Skills (WES) and you, the practitioner, come into play.

The WorkUp! toolkit

WorkUp! is a training model and toolkit for Workplace Essential Skills practitioners. The WorkUp! toolkit consists of this guide, Getting Through the Door, and a package of marketing materials to help you present the case for Workplace Essential Skills training at your first employer meeting.

Getting Through the Door

Marketing Workplace Essential Skills to employers is an art. It requires insight, timing and patience. The goal of this guide is to set you up better for long-term success. This guide includes a practitioner and an employer story to give you better insight into the marketing process from both perspectives.

Employer package

The employer package is designed to raise an employer's awareness of what Workplace Essential Skills are and how a targeted training intervention can be beneficial. The package includes:

- a presentation folder
- five case study summaries
- three brochures defining Essential Skills for the hospitality, manufacturing and construction sectors
- a WES audit
- a scenario illustrating complexity levels
- the steps of a WES program
- the benefits of WES training

Marketing Essential Skills

A practitioner's story

How did you prepare to market Workplace Essential Skills training to the employer you worked with?

The first step was going to WorkUp! training. I gained a strong understanding of the nine skills and all the elements of the training process right from the needs assessment at the outset. The second thing I learned is that it is very important to do your homework and to anticipate questions an employer may ask. You need to have ready answers. Finally, it is also vital to do preliminary research on the company you want to work with. You need to know something of their core business before you go into a meeting with them.

Why did you choose this employer?

I chose this company for a few reasons. To begin with, I already had a history with them. I had worked with them on the service side of oil and gas, and I knew someone on the manufacturing side. I approached him and asked for an introduction to a contact in their management team. He put me in touch with one of the project managers. Also, I felt the company wanted the training experience to benefit other aspects of the participants' lives outside of the workplace – to help them become more well-rounded and able to adapt. I also wanted to work with an employer who was interested in sustainable training. If we were going to make the investment in an WES training initiative, I wanted to make sure it was going to have a long-term impact in the organization. One of the ways I knew this was going to happen was that the participants agreed to hold themselves and each other accountable for continuing the learning path even after the training was finished.

How did you get buy-in from the employer?

Since I had already worked with this company, I knew their values. We

spoke a lot about the company goal of being an employer of choice. Finding and retaining skilled workers in this economy is tough. They wanted the learning opportunity to show support to employees who had expressed loyalty and had a clear future with them.

What did you talk about at that first meeting?

My main liaison was a project manager from the manufacturing arm. I provided a business case for workplace training and an overview of Workplace Essential Skills. I also explained the implementation process, from the needs assessment to the delivery and evaluation stages. Three other managers joined us in the second meeting where we went into more detail.

How was the Workplace Essential Skills training initiative communicated across the organization?

Some companies present a WES training initiative as an open learning opportunity for any employee to apply. This company, on the other hand, wanted to focus the initiative and maximize the impact. To do this, they selected specific employees with a long-term perspective and sent a personal invitation. They wanted to show support for employees who had the interest, loyalty, and potential for future promotions by offering the training to them.

Was the Workplace Essential Skills training successful?

Yes. Thirty employees from three levels in the organization participated in Working with Others and Oral Communication training. They showed a high degree of enthusiasm for applying their workplace learning to their job tasks and to their lives outside of work. What more can a WES practitioner ask for?



Project details

The trainer

Carmen, a Workforce Essential Skills Practitioner

The organization

A manufacturing company in central Alberta

The focus

Oral Communication and Working with Others

“I chose to work with an employer who wanted the Essential Skills training to make a long-term impact in their organization. I needed to respond to their environment – to work within their schedules, and connect Essential Skills to their bigger picture.”

– WES practitioner

1 prepare

Keeping yourself ready



Interesting facts

In a Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters (CME) survey, over 40% of manufacturers reported that skills shortages are seriously constraining their ability to improve business performance and growth.

CME asked its members to name the top ten skills most in need of improvement in their companies. Technical skills ranked only sixth.

The top three skills – communication, problem solving and teamwork – all belong to the Essential Skills framework.

(Canadian Council on Learning, 2006)

Invest in your own learning

As with any marketing or sales, to be successful, you have to be credible. To market Workplace Essential Skills training successfully, you need to understand Essential Skills and how they relate to the productivity and health of the workplace. Because of the changing nature of the labour market, advances in technology, and changes in labour sources, the relationship between Essential Skills and the workplace continually morphs as well. A good Workplace Essential Skills practitioner understands the importance of staying up-to-date in the field of Essential Skills through experience and by staying current with industry news and new research.

Another aspect to your credibility with an employer comes from showing you know something of their day-to-day world. You need to be able to hone in on their needs to provide rapid, sustainable and practical solutions drawn from your own experience and learning. Continue to invest in your capacity as an Essential Skills practitioner, and remember, you are also developing your skills in the Essential Skill of Continuous Learning!

The following areas are examples of how and where to invest in your learning, but please don't feel limited by these suggestions:

Master the Essential Skills methodology

Master the Essential Skills complexity levels so that your job-task analyses are precise and detailed. A number of educational institutes provide training in Essential Skills methodology and task analysis. Also, network as often as possible with experienced practitioners and related specialists to keep skills and knowledge up-to-date. Although many WES practitioners work independently, they benefit from a network through which they can partner on projects and share tactics in marketing and training.

Gain experience

Gain as much experience with industry as possible. The more experience you have, the better you are able to relate to a variety of employers and work situations. Moreover, the more experience you gain in different sectors, the more personal case studies and insights you will have to draw upon to show employers the value of a WES training initiative. One key way to gain more experience is to collaborate on various WES training projects with established organizations. Let these organizations

know you are available for work. Submit a copy of your resumé for them to keep on file. Also, gain as much experience as possible in the various aspects of the stages of an WES training project from the initial contact with employers to the needs assessment, development, delivery and evaluations.

Broaden all knowledge and skills

Broaden your knowledge and skills in other subjects related to workplace training. When advising clients, identifying gaps, developing curriculum and delivering training, you will benefit from familiarity with a variety of topics such as intercultural communication, conflict resolution, business operations, life skills and literacy. Participate in workshops, online courses or webinars. Read extensively.

Follow industry trends

Follow industry news on labour trends, sector developments and technological advances. Being able to relate to the issues affecting an employer can be the start of a good conversation, and may even open the door to a conversation about WES training opportunities.

Understand the impact of values

What motivates an employer to provide workplace training? Is it a desire to improve economic performance and profit, or is it more about social values and wanting to contribute to human potential and development? Everyone involved in a training initiative will be driven by some combination of business (head) or social (heart) values, including you, the WES practitioner. Make sure you understand the values underlying the employer's and other stakeholders' motivations and how your values fit. Be able to present your WES training case accordingly.

Make it your aim to identify what drives each decision maker in the WES initiative and speak to that. The business and social agendas of training are ultimately inseparable and interdependent, but you can choose how to sell it so that the employer listens. Very often, whether or not a WES training initiative gains traction in a company will depend on whether the WES practitioners were aware of their own interests, and whether they understood the interests of the key players.

The following table compares different aspects of the business agenda with the social agenda. Notice the examples of language that might illustrate values, opinions and preferred outcomes around training. Choose language that supports the values of the employer while also helping everyone understand the strategic value of the other side.



Make sure you understand why the employer is motivated and present your WES training case in those terms.

Comparing the Business and Social Agendas in Workplace Learning

	Business agenda	Social agenda
Driver	Head for business	Heart for people
Purpose	Business impact	Social impact
Value	The bottom line	Transferability of learning into broader life
Focus	Business-focused	Employee-centred
Pursuit	Competitive advantage	Human development
Commitment	Business performance	Integrity of the training, i.e. not watering down the topic because lack of interest or time
Outcome	Business outcomes such as productivity	Learning outcomes in knowledge, skills, attitude
Learning curve	Employees tend to be more loyal to companies that invest in them	Employees won't have jobs if economic performance is not a priority
Terminology	Schedules, recruitment, quality, retention, productivity, incidents, losses, change, deadlines, costs, waste, gaps, accidents, shortages, performance, absenteeism, issues, audits, conflicts, near misses, communication breakdowns, customers, processes, clients	Confidence, work life balance, level field, help, engagement, equity, teamwork, promotion, cross train, equality, opportunity, family support, excellence, long-term, future, lives, career, people, satisfaction, planning, mobility, potential, happy, enjoy, success, learn, adapt
Core truth Both truths are equally valid and fully interdependent	The specific purpose of a business is to make a profit. A company can justify its existence only by the economic results it produces. Managers must always, in every decision, put economic performance first. They are responsible for economic performance. (Drucker, 2008)	A business has only one true resource: people. It can only make a profit by helping people be productive. How management teams do this is a measure of the company's performance. Moreover, no business exists as an end in itself. Every one is an organ of society and exists for the sake of society. (Drucker, 2008)

Design your pitch

Workplace training or Essential Skills? In most marketing opportunities, you are going to be selling workplace training before you get a chance to explain Essential Skills. That 30-second pitch is just as important as the time it will take afterwards to explain the Essential Skills framework. Sometimes the two might blend into one presentation. But make sure you can get to the core of what you do in the few short moments that most employers have for you.

When do you need a pitch?

You should have a WES pitch on hand at all times. If you have a WES pitch you will be ready to market WES training at every opportunity. You could use it when you are networking at an event such as a conference or committee meeting, or even when talking to a friend-of-a-friend. You can use it when you are cold calling, giving a PowerPoint presentation to a senior leadership team, or by responding to an employer's request for information. The more you use your WES pitch, the better you will get at using it and adapting it to the various audiences you find yourself facing.

What is an elevator pitch?

An elevator pitch is the term used to describe what you say in that 30-second sales window. The Harvard Business School (HBS) has a user-friendly online Elevator Pitch Builder. The chart below is a modified version of the HBS tool. The right hand column gives an example of an WES pitch you might use and adapt when talking to an employer at a round-table session at a network event. You can adapt it by adding or removing elements, depending on your audience.

1	Who	Describe who you are. Keep it short. Hint: What would you most want the listener to remember about you?	I specialize in workplace training, using a very innovative approach involving Essential Skills.
2	What	Describe what you do. Here is where you state your value as results or impact. Hint: This should allow the listener to understand how you or your company would add value.	It is a very cost-effective way to go into an organization, figure out the training needs, and then suggest solutions and ways to implement them.
3	Why	Show the unique benefits you and/or your company bring to business. Hint: Show what you do that is different or better than others.	The great thing about an Essential Skills focused training program is that it targets both business needs and learning.
4	Goal	Describe your immediate goals. Goals should be concrete, defined and realistic. Include a time frame. Hint: This is the final step and it should be readily apparent to the listener what you are asking of him or her.	Perhaps we could get together next week to talk. or Can I call you on Tuesday to continue our conversation? or Why don't I follow-up with you tomorrow?

(Harvard Business School Elevator Pitch Builder, 2007)



Be ready with answers

An employer will always be able to find a reason not to invest in training. The return on investment is often not concrete enough for them. Make sure you have good stories (case studies) and memorized facts (statistics). Employee success stories touch on the emotional side of an employer while hard statistics speak to the practical side. A combination of these is vital to marketing WES training.

Statistics that support the benefits of WES training

Safety

WES training reduces accidents, incidents and near misses. The workforce becomes more educated on how to follow and think about Occupational Health and Safety standards.

82% of respondents associated increased health and safety with their workplace's Essential Skills program. – Conference Board of Canada, 2007

Productivity

Workplace learning has a direct correlation to increased productivity.

79% of respondents to a Conference Board of Canada study said productivity increased because of Essential Skills programs in their workplaces.

– Conference Board of Canada, 2007

Retention

Investing in employees through training usually increases loyalty and employee engagement. Building skills in employees allows them to take on more responsibility and grow with the company through promotions and advancement.

14 out of 15 employees said they “love learning” and many would leave a job that didn't provide opportunities to learn. – Victoria READ Society, 2009

Costs

Workplace learning has a direct correlation to a decrease in defects, errors and waste.

In one Canadian study, 85% of respondents saw increases in the quality of people's work and 73% saw increases in work effort. – Long 1997

How to respond to employers' most common objections

It costs too much

- A WES training initiative will ensure workers are safer and more competent. This is measured against insurance premiums and fines through reduced accidents, incidents and near misses.
- There are various ways to share costs. For example, 50 percent of training could happen during company time and 50 percent could take place on employee time.
- A WES needs assessment will ensure the root causes of performance gaps are accurately identified. Otherwise training will be ineffective.
- Running a small cost-effective pilot with a segment of the organization might be a good way to start.
- Think about how your company would benefit if you could identify needs and help your workers.
- Consider how much rehiring, incompetence and not being able to promote from within costs your company now.
- Consider whether your company's profitability could be higher.
- Consider that your staff turnover rate may be costing you money.
- Think about whether you are satisfied with how well workers meet quality standards.

Everyone can read

- Essential Skills encompass more than reading. Everybody has a degree of literacy – they are not simply literate or illiterate. The Essential Skills framework measures five levels for reading, ranging from level 1 (lowest) to level 5 (highest). This concept applies to all nine Essential Skills.
- National statistics reveal a different point of view. Research shows that 42% of working-age Canadians don't have the minimum literacy skills required to meet today's communication demands. 55% lack the minimum numeracy skills to handle information demands.

Unions won't support it

- Training based on Workplace Essential Skills test results help create safer work environments for union members.
- Unions tend to support assessments that are fair, reliable and effective. Unlike academic tests, WES assessments measure the specific skills needed for the job.
- Essential Skills can be taught. Workers with assessed skill gaps can be helped to develop their skills, keep their jobs and grow with the company.
- Consider whether you are satisfied with your company's safety record.
- Unions do support essential skills training. CUPE (the Canadian Union of Public Employees) and AUPE (the Alberta Union of Public Employees) are two of the biggest unions that support Essential Skills training. In fact, AUPE published *A Manual for Setting up an Essential Skills Program within the Union or Workplace*. Many unions are also involved in training and curriculum development.

Interesting facts

The International Adult Literacy Survey shows that every 1% increase in literacy skills boosts productivity by 2.5% and leads to a 1.5% increase in Canada's GDP. The report also states that raising literacy and numeracy skills for people at the lowest levels is more important to economic growth than producing more highly skilled graduates.

(Coulombe, Tremblay, Marchand, 2004)



Define your ideal company

At this point you should begin to think about what kind of employer you would like to work with in terms of company size, sector, business philosophy, company values, and even location. You may also want to think about which company characteristics don't fit with your values. It is very important to keep your own values in mind when considering which organizations to work with.

It may be helpful to create a profile of the type of company you would like to invest your time and services in. As you go forward, make note of cues in the words, attitudes and behaviours you see in your interactions with employers. Trust your instincts.

In "A Practitioner's Story" (page 3), the WES practitioner had very specific criteria. Defining your ideal company will help guide your decisions about who you work with.

We have created a chart to help you define your ideal client.

Who is your ideal WES client?

Read the following characteristics and think about how important they are to you. Remember not all companies will meet all your expectations. The list below is just to help you start thinking about the type of organization you want to work with.

Characteristics	Must have	Would be nice
1. Vision: The organization has a holistic and long-term vision of WES learning. They are not looking for a short-term “band aid” solution.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2. Motivation: The organization seeks a realistic balance between meeting both bottom lines: investing in people and making a profit.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3. Information session: The organization’s decision makers and other stakeholders are interested in learning more about the WES approach.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4. Champions: There is more than one champion of the WES initiative in the organization. The champion is not just the HR person. If the organizational contact resigns, the WES initiative will not lose momentum.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5. Top-down buy-in: The senior management team, including owner(s), president(s), director(s) and senior manager(s), are all committed to and informed about the WES initiative.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6. Bottom-up buy-in: The management team is committed to building a clear communication plan about the WES initiative to give employees enough information before work begins.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
7. Steady momentum: A realistic start date is set and there aren’t any unnecessary false starts.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
8. Access to the organization: The WES training team gets access to all levels of the organization.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
9. Time for needs assessment: The organization understands that a proper needs assessment takes time.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
10. Learner assessments: The organization understands the need for and is willing to cover the costs of the testing tools and the time it takes to administer them.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
11. Training times: The organization is willing to let employees learn during working hours, or to do a time-sharing model, e.g. 50% on employee time and 50% on organizational time.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
12. Resources: The organization is willing to purchase required resources.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
13. Training space: The organization will provide space for training that is quiet and away from interruptions.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
14. Follow-up: The organization builds in time to do a follow up evaluation to measure learner progress and the impact of the WES initiative on the workplace needs.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
15. Promotion: The organization is willing to give testimonials, references or help in other ways to promote future WES initiatives.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

2 contact

Connecting with clients



Leverage all your contacts to market Workplace Essential Skills training. These could be people you know personally or friends-of-friends.

Start with who you know

When starting out, most WES practitioners have at least a few contacts in industry. These could be people you know personally (primary contacts) or friends-of-friends (secondary contacts). Don't forget about your inner circle of friends and family. We often hesitate to call on friends or family for fear of imposing, but they might actually be quite willing to help. Keep a list of your contacts as you go, along with notes to remind yourself of where you met or who introduced you.

Email is an easy and low-risk way to begin approaching your contacts. Start by explaining what you are doing, how excited you are, and what kind of help you are looking for. Give them a chance to think about how they might help. Tell them you will follow-up with a telephone call within 24 hours. Remember to use your contact's name in the first sentence: "my very good friend, George Brown, gave me your number." Follow up within 24 hours. If you give as much context as you can, you should be able to start taking advantage of new networks, knowledge and experience.

Whether you are trying to make inroads into the organization or responding to a request for more information about training, you might be facing a waiting game. Be persistent while respecting the fact you are likely not at the top of the employer's priority list. While you are waiting for one employer, start making contacts with others.

Even if you feel ready to make cold calls, your existing contacts are a good starting point.

Don't forget to say thank you if something comes of it!

Use marketing tools

Your network, the web and advertising are your main marketing tools. Start with the tools you know how to use, but don't limit yourself to those. You might be comfortable maximizing your network by participating in conference events, but branch out into using tools such as social media. If you are going to empower employees to expand their workplace skills, then you can continue to identify with them by expanding your own Essential Skills.

Networking

Networking is a great way to market WES training. If you are a new WES practitioner, you may want to start by attending events to meet key people or by contacting an organization in your community that does Workplace Essential Skills training. In Alberta, Literacy Alberta and Alberta Workforce Essential Skills Society are both good places to start, and other provinces and territories have similar organizations. You could also do a Google search.

As you gain more experience, you can network through other channels:

- **Events:** Host or organize events, such as workshops or free training to attract employers. Attend events, such as conferences, where you can network with employers, talk about WES training and hand out your business cards. Present on Essential Skills or related workplace training issues to connect with employers.
- **Peers and organizations:** Introduce yourself and get to know the Essential Skills organizations that have existing networks in your area. Ask them to introduce you to others. Find out if you can volunteer in some capacity to get some experience and to get your name out. This provides a platform to contact employers and may even be the beginning of a partnership or collaboration. Participate in peer training sessions, such as workshops or conferences to connect with fellow WES practitioners.
- **Associations and councils:** Build your contacts with sector councils and associations who have an interest in promoting Essential Skills to their members. When communicating with sector associations that provide training, such as safety associations, suggest collaborating on WES training initiatives which they could help promote.



Respond to RFPs on Essential Skills projects. Employers will often partner with government funders, practitioners, teams or organizations.

When creating your web presence, think about what you want potential clients to know about you and Essential Skills.

Web presence

A web presence can take many different forms. If you are a new WES practitioner, a blog might be the most appropriate tool to start with. If you have more experience, you might consider a website. Choose from any of these and tailor them to your needs.

- **Website:** A basic website is a tool that is becoming more and more accessible for those of us without programming and design skills. New “do-it-yourself” software applications such as Weebly, Quackit, and many more, provide hundreds of templates with easy to understand instructions. The costs associated with hosting a website are more affordable as well.

Find the websites that you like on-line and think about them when you are designing your own in terms of the image and tone you would like to represent, and the content you want to provide. Think about what potential clients would want to know: what is your mandate and mission, what kind of projects you’ve already worked on, and even what your training values are. Make sure you have someone else review your website content before it goes live to check for grammar, spelling, and that you’ve included the necessary content. This rule applies to all of your communications.

- **Blog:** If you don’t want to set up a website, set up a blog instead. Blogs are an alternative media tool where an employer can view who you are and what you have done with WES training. Blogs are meant to be interactive and should be updated regularly with stories about employer satisfaction, employee successes, and new ideas or projects. Remember to ask for permission before you identify any of your clients.

Send your blog address to potential employers who may be unsure about committing to WES training. This is a great way to remind employers about the value in WES training and perhaps connect with them at a time when they might be planning training budgets for the year.

Blogs can be as easy to set up as a Facebook account, and should be updated regularly to stay fresh.

Social media

A web presence can also take more leading-edge forms. You might want to consult with someone who has expertise in using social media as a marketing tool to ensure you invest in the most effective tools. The most popular social media sites are:

- **Facebook:** Facebook is another mainstream web tool you can use to market WES training. Many companies benefit from having both a website and Facebook page.
- **LinkedIn:** Put your work profile up on LinkedIn.
- **YouTube:** Provide free information about WES training on YouTube. Make sure your contact information is included.
- **Twitter:** Twitter is a great way to connect with organizations who use Twitter as their own marketing tool. Join Twitter conversations tied to the workplace and raise the awareness of Essential Skills online.

Advertising

Some forms of advertising are likely too expensive for WES practitioners. However, there are other effective ways to advertise your services.

- Fact sheets for distribution at sector or safety associations
- Leaving cards or brochures
- Association magazines

Interesting facts

Statistics Canada indicates that by the early 2030s, one in four Canadians will be in the retirement stage of life. The aging population and shrinking labour pool mean that if employers are going to fill key positions, they may have to train for the needed skills rather than expecting to hire for them.

(Statistics Canada, 2011)

A 2006 report, Employer Investment in Workplace Learning in Canada, states that employers can no longer assume that the skills acquired in youth will carry workers through their active lives. The working life of most adults must be a period of continuous learning.

(Canadian Council on Learning, 2006)





Interesting facts

A 2006 report states Canada slipped from 12th to 20th place in terms of priority employers place on training workers. As a percentage of their overall payroll, US firms spend about 50% more on training than Canadian firms.

(Canadian Council on Learning, 2006)

A 2009 OECD report states that Canada lags behind in employer-sponsored training. 57% of businesses in Norway and 54% of businesses in Switzerland are likely to offer training, while only 45.5% do so in Canada.

(Canadian Council on Learning, 2007)

Pitch workplace training

Now is the time to put all of your preparation to work. This is the all-important first appointment, your chance to make a good first impression, to explain your training framework, and to walk out with an appointment for the next meeting. In other words, this is your chance to make a sale.

How are you going to set your talk up? The employer wants to know about how the training you are selling is going to affect him, not about the Essential Skills framework and methodology it is based on. Start by saying that your training isn't a one-size-fits-all, canned program. As a Workplace Essential Skills practitioner, you will come into the company to find out what their needs are first. You will help the employer understand what the organization's training needs are and outline solutions that are targeted to those needs – within the company's training budget. In this way, the training you provide is customized every time. This is the biggest selling feature.

Start by talking about the most pressing needs. If you get no response, bring up common issues that are present in many workplaces such as productivity, retention, health and safety, and absenteeism. That may help to open the conversation. Ask questions such as:

- What would you like to see happen?
- What is on your wish list?
- What would you like to see happen in three months, six months, one year?

Asking these questions gives you a chance to hear what the problem is and you can begin to talk about possibilities. Talk about the needs assessment again. Suggest that depending on what additional information the needs assessment reveals, the solution might lie in working with the supervisors by offering coaching on how to best work with that group. WES solutions always depend on the problems that the needs assessment uncovers.

Thinking on your feet is a skill that will serve you well, and the better equipped you are, the more natural it will become. You might realize that the best solution is to have a small, low-cost, immediate success that will lead to future work. You might even propose a short no-cost needs assessment. Find a foot into the organization and remember that Workplace Essential Skills sell themselves once they get traction.

Persuade the employer to set aside time and money for a post-training evaluation. You and the employer will want to know what the impact of the training was, and data gathered from the evaluations will be central to marketing further WES training initiatives in the future.

Explain Workplace Essential Skills

The Essential Skills framework takes time to explain. Factor this in when you are scheduling an employer meeting. Employers need time to internalize what they find out from you regarding Essential Skills and to decide where they need training most.

This is a good time to take out the employer package and walk them through each of the resources. Every single conversation you have at this point is going to be different. Don't rush the sell. Listen carefully to what the employer is saying and asking.

Persuade the employer

Now that you've explained Workplace Essential Skills, try to get the employer agreeing with you about some of the concepts and how they relate specifically to this company. Ask questions such as, "Would you say your staff has some of these issues? Does any of this sound familiar?"

Do your homework. Be able to speak the language of the employer. Tailor your pitch to the business context you are in. Do you know the size of the company and how many shifts and locations there are? Would training need to take place in the middle of the night or at another location? Appeal to the values you've already established. Are they interested in the bottom line or in developing their employees. Some people are persuaded by success stories and others by facts. Some employers are moved to action by helping employees and others by helping the business. Both are fundamental to a strong WES training program

Close the deal. Ask when you can start.

Not all employers will be interested in training. Figure out which employers you want to spend time with and don't waste time on the others. By this stage of the game, you should know who to follow up with and who to cut loose or put on the back burner for another day.

The biggest reason a sale doesn't close is because the person selling doesn't ask: "When can we start?"

4 communicate

Building company-wide buy-in



Develop a communication plan

Developing a good communication plan is essential to the success of your Workplace Essential Skills training. Even if the employer is on board, you will still have to market to the company's leadership team and to every employee who will be involved in the data collection or training.

A good communication plan will include written information and presentations to ensure that everybody in the company is informed, engaged, positive and willing to participate. Work with the employer to create a unified message. This is where your knowledge of business and social motivations will inform your tone.

Offer to be present at any key meetings where the WES training initiative is explained to employees so that you can help.

It is vital that no one feels threatened or suspicious of the WES training initiative. When employees arrive for work and suddenly find out they are going to be job-shadowed or interviewed, they will wonder why they were selected. Others may wonder why they were not selected. You don't want employees worrying about their performance or job security. It undermines both team morale and the entire process.

Your written communications and presentations should:

- Outline the reason for the WES training initiative.
- Outline the steps of the phase you are introducing. For example, needs assessment involves interviews, focus groups, job shadowing and questionnaires.
- Clearly communicate the employer's expectations.
- Overview the nine Essential Skills. Use one of the sector brochures or refer to the HRSDC website for examples of how the skills apply in various workplaces.
- Address confidentiality.
- Follow plain language principles.

Employer perspectives on getting buy-in

“Capitalize on the model of needs assessment and customized training. It’s pretty unique to the work force.”

“Sometimes it will take time. Remind them that it needs to go in the budget.”





Marketing Essential Skills

An employer's story

“We wanted to partner with WES practitioners who could give us that all-important objective look at our organization and recommend realistic changes. We needed a positive WES practitioner who could infuse our organization with that positivity.”

Project details

The employer

Simone, a human resources manager

The organization

A hotel in Alberta

The focus

Workplace Essential Skills program

What piqued your interest in workplace training and Essential Skills?

Staff retention is a vital business strategy for the hotel. We want to offer opportunities to staff that will make them happy to stay with us. Also, we really wanted to see where we were at in terms of performance, and what kind of learning needs we had. We always want training to benefit both the staff and the business. At the end of the day, we strive to take care of our staff by ensuring they have the right knowledge and skills for their jobs.

What was it about the WES practitioner that built that initial level of trust for you?

First of all, we were approached by a WES practitioner from the Community Adult Learning Centre that already had a strong presence and good track record in our local community. We were interested to see what they had to offer. Because of that initial level of trust, we were keen to utilize the outside perspective they had to offer us. We wanted to work with an organization that would be able to build trust with our employees, and therefore gain valuable feedback from the grass roots of the hotel.

What could deter an employer like yourself from pursuing WES training in your organization?

The budget is a key consideration, as are the hours for training and the quality of the instruction. We are a very busy hotel. We run 24/7. We needed flexibility in the training schedule. Training needs to be short and to the point. It has to be focused on the core skills and knowledge that our employees need to do their jobs well. It means that the classroom time has to be maximized with very strong instruction. In terms of the budget, it must be cost-effective for us. One way to do this is by recommending phases for various training initiatives. If you are successful with the first phase, it will build momentum in our organization for the new phases.

What are the most important points for a WES practitioner to remember when marketing WES training to an employer like yourself?

As a WES practitioner, you have to be positive. You need to be excited about what you do because that enthusiasm must connect with our staff. We want our employees to be excited about learning opportunities. The practitioner needs to be able to help us build the motivation and momentum for learning in our organization.

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