

# case study

Workplace Essential Skills training

**Scotiabank**



## Overview

Founded in Halifax, Nova Scotia, in 1832, Scotiabank has become a global financial leader and one of Canada's most successful banks, with over 19 million customers in more than 55 countries. The company website, [www.scotiabank.com](http://www.scotiabank.com), states that Scotiabank is "committed to helping individuals, companies, and communities to thrive in a changing world. From personal and business banking, brokerage, and insurance, to private wealth, and the most sophisticated commercial, corporate and institutional services."

Scotiabank employs over 75,000 employees, with a commitment to meeting the needs of their customers and providing advice and solutions that will build their customer's financial positions.

## The needs assessment

A needs assessment was conducted over a period of two days in October 2011, at a small Alberta Scotiabank. The needs assessment was created primarily from questions that arose during meetings between the bank manager and trainer, and by adapting questions developed within the Workplace Essential Skills training. Questions were also developed through referencing *Collaborative Needs Assessment – A Handbook for Workplace Development Planners* by Paul Jurmo and Sue Folinsbee.

All staff were interviewed, with the exception of two casual employees and one full-time employee on leave. There were two focus group interviews held as well. The two focus groups were the bank sales team and the service team.

The sales team consisted of the:

- branch manager
- account manager for small businesses
- personal banking officer

The service team consisted of the:

- manager of customer services
- customer support representative
- three customer representatives

As well as holding focus group and individual interviews, documents were reviewed. Types of documents reviewed included:

- position descriptions and competencies
- application for employment
- product pamphlets
- evaluation and progress feedback forms
- achievement assessment form
- customer representative guide

Signage around the bank and the online Scotiabank site were also reviewed.

## Needs assessment questions

### Focus group questions:

Note: Some questions were specific for individual focus groups.

- Can you explain the role of the sales team/service team?
- What responsibilities does the sales team/service team have?
- How do the sales team and service team interact with one another?
- What kind of problems come up on the job?
- Are there glitches in communication? If so where?
- Are there glitches in training? If so where?
- Are there glitches in other areas? (specific Essential Skills areas?)
- What kind of training do you think people should have to do their jobs better?
- How much of your work is done on computers?
- Is everyone on the inter-office computer communication system? Could you explain how it works? (sales team question)
- What works well in this place?
- What does not work well?

### Individual interview questions:

Note: Follow-up questions were asked to dig deeper.

- What is your job position? How long have you been in your current job position?
- Describe a typical work day?
- Who or where do you go for help on the job?
- What aspects or parts of your job do you find the most difficult?
- What do you like most about this job?
- What do you like least about this job?
- Do you train or mentor others?
- What Essential Skills are most important for doing your job? (go through each Essential Skill)
- How much of your time and in what way do you use the following Essential Skills for your job? Reading, Writing, Document Use, Numeracy, Computer Use, Thinking, Oral Communication, Working with Others, Continuous Learning.
- Do you have to do a lot of on-the-job learning for your job?
- What training did you have for your position? How was that training presented?
- What are the most important personal characteristics needed to do your job?
- What further training would you like?
- What further training do you feel would benefit this workplace?
- (Bank Manager: BM) What do you see as the biggest challenge for continuous improvement for your staff and yourself?
- (BM) How do you know people have understood the workplace training they have taken?
- (BM) Is there a high turnover here? If so, why? If not, what keeps them here?
- (BM) What kind of staff team building do you do?
- (BM) What would give you the biggest bang for your buck in regards to training?

## Planning and delivering the training

Following the needs assessment process, a report of the findings was prepared and presented to the bank manager. The needs assessment report showed that the primary areas for Essential Skills training were:

- Oral Communication
- Working with Others
- Continuous Learning

Computer Use, mentoring others and plain language were mentioned as other training opportunities that could be pursued if time allowed.

Consultations between the trainer and bank manager determined the training formats and focus. It was decided that training would happen prior to and following business hours. The bank employed limited staff, so training was not possible during business hours. All full time staff arrived at work a minimum of one hour before the bank opened for the day. The half hour before the bank opened was used as morning “huddle time” by bank staff. Huddle time was used for staff training and team building. This time seemed appropriate for training, so Tuesday and Friday mornings were chosen. Workshops that required more time were scheduled for after business hours.

The bank manager and trainer agreed to focus training on Oral Communication And Working with Others. It was also decided to do two workshops. The first workshop was on learning styles and the second was plain language training.

All full-time staff were included in training. Casual workers were welcomed and attended training on scheduled work days.

Employees that participated in the training:

- were all women
- were between the ages of 20 and 65
- were Canadian born
- had worked for Scotiabank between 1 year and 30+ years

The exception was one worker who began work with the bank  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the way through the training. She was an English language learner with no previous banking experience. She did not participate in the needs assessment process, but did attend the training sessions.

The training began with a two-hour workshop on learning styles. This workshop helped learners understand their own learning styles as well as their co-workers'. It also provided them with a personal framework for learning throughout the training.

Learners commented that the learning styles workshop was valuable as it helped them with “knowledge of others learning styles.” One learner also remarked that it would make her “more aware of what and how” she does her job, and how “to be more efficient.” The bank manager noted that the workshop would help with training new staff and pairing staff for mentoring.

Following the learning styles workshop, training moved to a focus on Oral Communication. This was the largest section of training provided. Oral Communication was delivered and divided into the following topics:

- introduction to types of communication
- introduction to effective communication
- active listening
- assertive communication
- building consensus
- dealing with conflict

When the training on Oral Communication was complete, the trainer moved to a section on Working with Others. This section covered the following topics:

- introduction to working with others
- Working with Others or working alone
- work flow
- dealing with difficult people
- cultural diversity

A two-hour workshop was also delivered on plain language training. This workshop was held for the sales team only. In attendance were the bank manager and the personal banking officer. Both learners found the workshop very beneficial. Following the workshop, the bank manager commented that she was able to alter a fire evacuation procedure checklist from a readability statistic of 7.8 on the Flesh-Kincaid grade level scale to below a 4.0.

As most training was delivered in half-hour sessions, topics took on average between two and four sessions to complete. Training was delivered through use of individual questionnaires and writing activities, paired work, group activities, PowerPoint presentations, group discussions and flip chart work.

Although Computer Use and mentoring others came up as possibilities for training, there was insufficient time to cover these topics.

## Evaluation

Evaluation was done both in written form and verbally. Two written evaluations were completed. One was done at the end of the learning styles workshop, and one was completed at the end of the entire training process.

Verbal evaluation was done periodically throughout the training. This form of evaluation was conducted as an entire learning group at the end of various sessions, as well as one-on-one. After verbal evaluations, the trainer wrote verbatim notes for future referencing. The trainer was in contact on a regular basis with the bank manager for scheduling as well as feedback.

Evaluation was beneficial to both the trainer and the learners. The trainer was able to gauge the impact of training on the learners and potential areas for further training. The trainer was also able to consider the effectiveness of the training style and content. Learners were able to evaluate their personal growth as a result of the training and topics they would still like to see covered.

## Learning Styles Workshop

### Evaluation

**To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of these statements.**

(circle your response)

1. I found most of the workshop to be valuable.  
Strongly disagree      Disagree      No opinion      Agree      Strongly agree
2. The workshop was thought-provoking and engaging.  
Strongly disagree      Disagree      No opinion      Agree      Strongly agree
3. The facilitator was knowledgeable and well organized.  
Strongly disagree      Disagree      No opinion      Agree      Strongly agree
4. The workshop accommodated a variety of learning styles.  
Strongly disagree      Disagree      No opinion      Agree      Strongly agree
5. I learned new skills and strategies that I can readily put to use.  
Strongly disagree      Disagree      No opinion      Agree      Strongly agree
6. What did you find to be most valuable from today's workshop? Why?
7. What did you find to be the least valuable from today's workshop? Why?
8. How did today's workshop impact your professional growth?
9. Additional comments

## Scotiabank

### Final evaluation of Workplace Essential Skills training

#### Participant

During the course of the Workplace Essential Skills (WES) training, we have covered the following topics:

- Learning styles
- Oral Communication
  - Active listening
  - Assertive communication
  - Building consensus
  - Resolving conflict
  - Working with difficult people
- Working with Others
  - Team work
  - Workplace flow
  - Cultural awareness
- Plain language
  - (Bank manager – BM)
  - (Personal banking officer – PBO)

Several of these topics took more than one session. A few of these topics came up throughout the training, such as Assertive Communication and Learning Styles.

Take a few minutes to travel back in your mind over the last three months of training and then answer the questions on the following pages. You do not need to put your name on this evaluation.

**Circle the score that most closely matches your response, according to the following scale:**

1 = Unsatisfactory, 2 = Fair, 3 = Good, 4 = Very Good, 5 = Excellent

<b>Facilitator</b>	Rating
Presented materials in a clear and logical manner	1 2 3 4 5
Demonstrated knowledge about Learning Styles	1 2 3 4 5
Demonstrated knowledge of Oral Communication	1 2 3 4 5
Demonstrated knowledge of Working with Others	1 2 3 4 5
Demonstrated knowledge on Plain Language (BM and PBO)	1 2 3 4 5
Appeared prepared and well organized	1 2 3 4 5
Demonstrated ability to effectively handle questions	1 2 3 4 5
Overall quality of facilitation	1 2 3 4 5

## Content

	Yes	No
Did this training meet your expectations?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Was the training content for each topic relevant?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Did the training help you improve your understanding of your learning style?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Did the training help you improve Oral Communication skills?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Did the training help you improve your Working with Others skills?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Did the training help you understand the importance of plain language (BM and PBO)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Overall, was the training useful?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are the skills you learned in training transferable for you? (Could you use these skills outside the workplace?)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

## Pace

How would you rate the pace of this training?     Too slow     About right     Too fast

What did you find most valuable?

What did you find least valuable?

What do you suggest to improve this training?

Please feel free to provide any other comments:

**Thank you!**

## Innovation

Innovative learning approaches used at Scotiabank include:

- teaching segments followed by related group and paired activities
- activities and exercises that engaged learners and developed skills
- curriculum built specifically to meet the needs of the workplace
- flexible teaching methods and activities

## Challenges

The largest challenge faced by the trainer and learners was the half-hour training times. There were many times when the trainer would have to stop in the middle of an activity or discussion because of banking hours. At times these discussions were important for the learners' growth. As much as possible, the trainer would review the topic during the next session.

One-hour time slots would have been more conducive to training. One learner remarked that "one-hour time slots would have been better for the areas where more discussion was warranted. We all like to talk." The trainer worked to prepare half-hour long segments for training, but this was not always possible. The advantage of using huddle time for training was the ability to have all full-time staff attend.

Another challenge faced by the trainer and learners was scheduling. At times the bank schedule and the trainer's schedule did not work. On these occasions, the trainer and bank manager would work out alternative dates for training.

## Impacts and benefits

The Workplace Essential Skills training was very well received in this workplace, from the first meeting with the bank manager, to the final day of training. The trainer received excellent support, full participation from learners, and useful feedback.

Evaluations from learners, both verbal and written, speak to a positive impact for both learners and the workplace as a whole. The impact and benefits of this project are apparent through the evaluation comments of learners, both spoken and written.

- One learner commented that the training "makes me more aware of my work situation and how to handle situations." This learner also commented that training was helpful as well, "at home, communicating with my family."
- Another learner remarked that training was beneficial for "learning about how others learn and work. It helps me to understand why their approach is different from mine."
- Yet, another learner commented that the training "reinforced her commitment to her job and team."
- With training built specifically to the needs of the business, full-time employees have improved their understanding of communication skills, as well as skills needed in the workplace to work efficiently and effectively with one another and with clients.
- The bank manager commented that the training "has improved active listening and everyone is paying closer attention."

## **What Scotiabank had to say about being involved in the Workplace Essential Skills training**

“This is a new model for training and we really liked it. We have attended lots of training, but it has always been prescribed and not in response to a direct need.”

“Communication is much more open. Staff have mentioned that they are also using these strategies at home.”

“There has been a very quick increase in confidence, more open communication. When one of the employees who was on leave during the training returns, she will find a different workplace. It was very timely training as the manager had requested communication skills training.”

“This training exceeded everything that was expected.”

## **Final comments**

Individuals desire the “personal touch” that banks advertise they deliver. This small town Alberta Scotiabank delivers on that promise. The staff are friendly, community-minded, and motivated to learning new skills to improve themselves within the workplace.

The Workplace Essential Skills training at this small Alberta bank was a positive experience and well received by all learners. It was apparent from comments and feedback that learners enjoyed the training and the quality of facilitation. It was also easy to note that learners enjoyed the team building because of their positive attitude during training.

A community individual stopped the trainer on the street one day to comment that she was jealous she was not in the training and wanted to be because of a conversation she had with one of the learners.

Following the success of the project, the trainer was offered a position working within the bank.

## Training tools

### Sample lesson plan 1

#### Lesson plan: Workplace flow

Note: This lesson took two sessions to complete (1 hour).

##### Welcome

- Welcome learners
- Briefly review last sessions topic (Working with Others/Working Alone)
- Refer to the “Confidence Quiz” to refresh learners’ memories if needed.
- Are there questions that have arisen since the last session?
- Are there learnings that have occurred related to this topic?

##### Getting started

- Have learners take a blank piece of paper and write on the top the following words

##### **Job duties    Directly impacts    Others impacted**

- Explain to learners that you want them to write the different job duties they have throughout the day. If they have a hard time getting started, tell them to think about a typical day, and start from the beginning. Give learners time to write their duties.
- After they have completed their job duties, tell them to think about who is directly impacted by each of their duties (other workers, not clients). Explain to learners that by this you mean those:
  - who will have to sign off on the task
  - who will have that paper come across their desk for consideration or further work
  - who need to see the paper or task to do their job
  - who are also involved in doing that job with their co-worker (team work)
- Answer clarification questions
- Learners might have other examples of where a worker is directly impacted
- After learners have completed the middle column, have them add other workers that are impacted, but not as directly impacted as those in the middle column. Workers in this column will include:
  - other bank employees that might not come into contact with the work, but are possibly impacted by decisions made as a result of the work, or by possible mistakes
  - other banking staff outside the branch
  - workers that might come into the work “down the line”
- Brainstorm others impacted if need be, as learners might have other examples of where a worker is indirectly impacted.

## Discussion

- Talk about workplace flow. Be specific to the workplace. Talk about how what one person does in this small bank has ripples through the entire bank and larger organization. Use examples specific to the bank. A client comes in to open a bank account and get a Visa. Who is involved? Who needs to do what job duties? Who is directly impacted by work done? Who else will be impacted, to a lesser degree?
- Work through learners' job flow sheets (use at least one job duty from each learner) and ask:
  - What is the job duty?
  - Who is directly impacted?
  - Who else is impacted?
- When learners are not clear about who is impacted by their work, ask the whole group who they think is impacted and how.
- After going through job flow sheets, start a conversation about how important job flow is in the bank. Ask what would happen if (use examples from job duties) the work flow broke down.

## Flip chart work

- Draw a simplified organizational chart  
Place job titles on the side – have learners discuss who works with who, and how they work together. Draw lines or arrows to show work flow.
- Draw a local branch organizational chart  
Place job titles on the side – discuss who works with whom and how they work together. Draw lines or arrows to show the work flow within the branch.

## Conclusion

- Thoughts, learnings, observations, questions

## Sample lesson plan 2

### Lesson plan: Working with difficult people

Note:

- A lesson on this topic was specifically requested by bank management
- This lesson required learners to do a short piece of homework prior to the session taking place.

Resources for this lesson were adapted from [www.dealingwithdifficultpeople.org](http://www.dealingwithdifficultpeople.org)

#### Homework

- Prior to teaching this session, have learners answer the following question on paper: "I would be more effective working with my difficult person if ...". What is your if? Ensure learners that they will not be required to share what they write with the larger group.

#### Welcome

- Welcome learners
- Briefly review last session's topic (Workplace flow)
- Refer to the organizational chart to refresh learners' memories if needed.
- Are there questions that have arisen since the last session?
- Are there learnings that have occurred, related to this topic?

#### Introduction

- Talk about a personal experience of working with a difficult person. What was the situation (don't share outcome at this point).
- Brainstorm ways the trainer could handle the difficult person (give examples if needed – confront difficult person, quit, etc.).

#### Getting started

- Have learners look at what they wrote for homework. Is their answer dependent on their difficult person doing something to change? Why do you think they would change to make your life easier? They won't. So how are we going to be more effective when working with this person? There are three things that you can change.
  - The system. Maybe the difficult person is difficult because they are a "stick to the rules" kind of person and you aren't. If you could just change the system it would make your life a lot easier, don't you think? Of course, changing the system is an extremely time-intensive proposition with no guarantee of any success.

- The other person (the difficult person). It's not so easy to change the other person because there is no incentive for them to change. What they are doing is working just fine for them, isn't it? Trying to change a person is like hitting your head against a brick wall... it just doesn't work.
- You. You have one hundred percent control over what you do. You could try to change your perspective on the situation.
- Refer back to trainer's personal experience and what the group brainstormed. Mention that what the trainer's "difficult person" wanted was attention and acknowledgement. The trainer was giving her both of those things. The trainer needed to change her own way of dealing with the situation.
- "If you keep on doing what you've always done, you'll keep on getting what you've always got."
- The saying above is completely true. If the trainer wanted her "difficult person" to change the way she acted, the trainer needed to change what she (trainer) was doing, and not give the difficult person what she wanted. People are difficult because they are getting something out of the deal. They may be getting different things, like attention or agreement. If we want them to do something different (remember the homework question?) then we need to DO something different.
- Have learners refer back to their homework. Have them silently think about their difficult person and how they have been dealing with the situation. What could they do differently to change the situation?
- Ask if anyone wants to share their homework response. If not, set up the following scenario:
  - If a difficult person wants to continually complain that they hate their job, and in the past a co-worker has always agreed, or smiled and acknowledged her, what can the co-worker do to stop being involved in this situation? (The next time the difficult person says "I hate this job," the co-worker should not argue with her or agree with her. The co-worker could say something like "I LOVE working here!")
- This is work! Sometimes a lot of work. Be consistent.

## Discussion

- If time allows, brainstorm work-related situations with difficult people. (Learners can use past experiences if they are more comfortable.) Have learners come up with effective ways to deal with each scenario presented.

## Conclusion

- Thoughts, learnings, observations, questions

## Resources

- Folinsbee, S., & Jurmo, P. (1994). *Collaborative needs assessment: A handbook for workplace development planners*. Toronto, ON: ABC Canada Literacy Foundation.
- Moore, A. (2006). *Making it work: A workbook on conflict and communication for adult literacy learners*. Guelph, ON: Garlic Press.
- Office of Literacy and Essential Skills. (n.d.). *Literacy and essential skills tool DVD*. Ottawa, ON: Human Resources and Skills Development Canada.
- Still, R., Weir, L., & Goldblatt, A. (2007). *Creating learning partners: A facilitator's guide for training effective adult literacy tutors*. Calgary, AB: Literacy Alberta.

## Websites

- Alberta Workforce Essential Skills: [www.awes.ca](http://www.awes.ca)
- Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks On the Job series: Available through the National Adult Literacy Database: [www.nald.ca](http://www.nald.ca)
- Dealing with Difficult People: [www.dealingwithdifficultpeople.org](http://www.dealingwithdifficultpeople.org)
- Education Scotland: [www.educationscotland.gov.uk](http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk)
- Skills Converged: Training materials on productivity, soft skills, and personal development: <http://www.skillsconverged.com/>
- Workplace Education Manitoba: [www.wem.mb.ca](http://www.wem.mb.ca)



# case study

Workplace Essential Skills training

## Flint Process Systems

A division of Flint Energy Services



## Overview

Flint Energy Services Ltd. is a market leader providing an expanding range of integrated products and services for the oil and gas industry including: production services, infrastructure construction, oilfield transportation and maintenance services. With more than 11,000 employees, Flint provides this unique breadth of products and services through over 80 strategic locations in the oil and gas producing areas of North America, from Inuvik in the Northwest Territories to Mission, Texas, on the Mexican border. Flint is a preferred provider of infrastructure construction management, module fabrication, maintenance services for upgrading and production facilities in Alberta's oil sands sector.

Flint Process Systems Ltd., a subsidiary of Flint Energy Services Ltd., is a world-class well site equipment manufacturer offering oil and natural gas customers in the Western Canada Sedimentary Basin the highest quality in surface production equipment. Their state-of-the-art 50,000 sq. ft. fabrication plant is strategically located in Halkirk, Alberta, where Flint's products are designed and manufactured to conform to provincial, federal and international regulatory codes, safety acts, and customer specifications. A dedicated project manager oversees design and fabrication from start to finish, and their products undergo comprehensive functional testing prior to shipment. They ensure that their products meet the highest quality standards and performance.

The Flint Process Systems Manufacturing Facility at Halkirk, Alberta, employs from 85 to 125 staff, who work in all stages of the manufacturing process, from product engineering and design and material management through structural and pressure vessel welding, instrumentation and electrical system installation to finishing and shipping the completed products. The Halkirk facility operates under the guidance of an on-site management team.

Flint Process Systems was identified as a good candidate for Workplace Essential Skills training for several reasons:

- The Halkirk fabrication plant is geographically located in the heart of east central Alberta and is one of the largest employers in the region.
- Employees of Flint Process Systems hold certification in a full range of manufacturing trades, including structural and pressure welding, instrumentation, electrical and fabrication. As well, Flint Halkirk employs a materials management team, engineers, a safety coordinator, labourers and administrative staff.
- The trainer has a personal history with the Halkirk facility.

## The needs assessment

The needs assessment process began with a meeting with a leadership team identified for the project by the site manager. The team included the site manager, the production manager, the assistant production manager and the fabrication supervisor.

The trainer introduced the workplace training and the concept of Workplace Essential Skills. It was decided that Flint Process Systems, Halkirk would be interested in participating in the project.

The following questions were considered at the initial meeting (note: not all questions posed were fully considered or answered).

- What are Flint's goals/interests for participating?
  - To improve peoples' ability to cope at work and in their everyday lives
  - To improve peoples' job satisfaction
  - To be seen as an "employer of choice"
  - To increase employee retention
- What does Flint Process Systems expect to see as a result of this exercise?
- How will participants be identified?
  - The program would be offered to those who are past probation and are involved in an apprenticeship program or have otherwise demonstrated a commitment to stay with the organization.
  - Participants would be invited or "strongly encouraged" to participate.
  - Team leads would all be involved in training on conflict resolution and working with others.

- What is the culture of the organization? What changes have occurred or are expected?
  - The Halkirk Facility has been through a succession of owners in recent years, including an employee-ownership scheme. The core staff is committed to the facility, if not to Flint as a corporate manager.
  - The facility is subject to the variances of the oil and gas industry in Alberta, which typically fluctuates through a series of annual and economic cycles, resulting in a hiring/lay-off pattern.
  - The site manager has a real desire that his facility will be viewed as an “employer of choice.”
- What does Flint currently offer for training?
  - New hire orientation – typically four hours which includes a tour of the facility, an introductory video and safety training.
  - Safety training – offered on-site by the safety coordinator. Includes First Aid, WHMIS (Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System), propane management and confined space training.
  - Apprenticeships – Flint Process Systems pays all education costs for apprentices and provides supplemental pay to top up Employment Insurance proceeds.
- What support/input/approval/buy-in is required from Flint Corporate?
- What does Flint Halkirk need its employees to learn/be able to do?
- What are Flint’s motivators? What are individual motivators?

Within the parameters of the Workplace Essential Skills training were:

- Anything pertaining to the nine Essential Skills
- Sustainability of the training – including some “train the trainer” if necessary

Outside of the parameters of the Workplace Essential Skills training were:

- GED preparation – this could be accommodated by additional resources and training workshops
- Full “train the trainer” services
- Leadership development

The leadership team had identified several key areas that they believed would benefit from the Essential Skills training project:

- Working with Others – Conflict resolution skills
- Numeracy – Fraction-decimal and metric-SAE conversion
- Computer Use – Basic functions including email management, Excel Spreadsheets and Word documents
- Basic Reading and Writing – It was identified that the overall proficiency was adequate, with some exceptions. Neatness and accuracy were ongoing concerns.
- Management skills – Including meeting skills, delegation, action planning and accountability.

Part II of the needs assessment process consisted of a series of meetings with each functional group from the Halkirk Facility. There were an average of nine participants for each meeting (range was five to 13 participants), and supervisors were assembled apart from front line workers. The meetings were each one hour in duration and consisted of:

- Completion of the HRSDC Tool *Essential Skills Self-Assessment for the Trades (document #WP-135-10-09E)* by each participant
- Conversation among the group around their perception of the areas identified by the tool, and their identified needs. Some key questions asked by the facilitator were:
  - What are the things that stood out for you from this tool?
  - What are your challenges around these skills at work? At home?
  - Looking forward, what are your goals and objectives?
  - How do you like to learn?
- Individual, private conversation with anyone who was interested around their areas of identified need.

The trainer compiled all of the results of the assessment tool and presented a summary to the leadership team.

**One thing that it is important to note regarding the process to this point:** It took six months from the date of the first meeting with the site manager of Flint Process Systems to the date the needs assessment interviews were held. We were delayed several times, and the actual date for the interviews was moved twice.

## Planning and delivering the training

As indicated above, the Halkirk Facility of Flint Process Systems is located in rural east central Alberta. Workers are almost exclusively Canadian-born, English-speaking, long-term residents of the area. Some workers have relocated from other provinces. Of the group that participated in the Workplace Essential Skills training, 28% were female. All were identified as long-term employees and/or employees who were identified as having potential to grow within the organization.

The results of the needs assessment were reviewed by the leadership team. They met with the trainer and as a group they decided that training would focus on three Essential Skills: Computer Use, Oral Communication, and Working with Others. Training would be conducted using two formats.

- Computer Use training would be offered on site during the employee lunch hour, and would be entirely voluntary. The format would be flexible and responsive to specific requests. Flint Process Systems provided portable computers to be used during the lunch hour workshops.
- Oral Communication and Working with Others would be incorporated into a series of three 3-hour workshops that would be offered on-site during regular working hours. These workshops were offered to three distinct employee groups: front line workers, team leads, and management/supervisory staff.

The trainer designed the training according to the time available and to the topics identified as necessary.

The Computer Use training was initially designed to move progressively from basic skills through to more in-depth functions. Due to the wide range of skills demonstrated by the participants, it became obvious that a one-on-one approach focusing on specific identified needs would be more effective. The computer training workshops were offered a total of six times, with varying attendance and results.

The members of the leadership team were very specific in their desire for Oral Communication and Working with Others skills training. They identified communication breakdowns as one of the key trouble areas within the facility. They also asked specifically for training around conflict management.

The trainer used their discussion to design a series of workshops that moved from communication basics, through self-awareness, self-confidence and assertiveness, into conflict resolution. These workshops were presented to three different groups, which consisted of employees who worked at different levels within the facility.

- Front line workers – included labourers and workers at various stages of apprenticeship programs.
- Team leads – these were people identified as leaders within their group, who had been placed in supervisory positions, and who were struggling to manage the “softer” aspects of management.
- Management – this group included senior leaders and supervisors.

Examples of the curriculum used for these workshops is in the training tools section below.

## Evaluation

Several methods of evaluation were used in this project.

- Specific questionnaires were completed by each participant after each workshop session
- Oral evaluation conversations with participants
- Evaluation and de-briefing meetings with the leadership team after each series of workshops was complete
- Follow-up conversation with the site manager

Overall the short-term evaluation demonstrated a positive response to the training provided. Participants were asked about their level of satisfaction with the instructor, with the facility and with the course materials. The responses to these questions were consistently positive.

Participants were also asked to identify how they planned to implement the skills they had learned in their workplace and in their daily lives. Samples of responses include:

- By reviewing handouts
- By trying to be conscious of personal actions and behaviours
- By posting “prompt sheets” in visible and prominent places to act as reminders
- By talking with other participants
- By asking others to hold them accountable

Through the evaluation process, one key theme became obvious. Front line workers were very willing to learn new skills around Working with Others and Oral Communication, as long as their supervisors participated in the same training and learned the same skills. Team leads were also very interested in acquiring skills in these areas, with the qualifier that front line workers and managers also participate in the training. Management felt it was critical for front line workers and team leads to take part in the same training they had. In essence, every group that participated in the training owned some responsibility for learning better communication skills, but insisted that every other group take ownership as well.

## Challenges

- The cyclical nature of oil and gas manufacturing industry creates a small window for training. We needed to work around their peak schedule.
- Even though a prior relationship existed, it was still a struggle to get responses from management.
- Availability of trainer – working on project in conjunction with two other jobs.
- Cost to Flint Process Systems to free up workers for training – we really needed to be able to demonstrate long-term value of the training investment.
- GED preparation training was indicated as a need. That training was outside of the scope of this project.

## Impact and benefits

Based on feedback from the workplace, the impact from this training project was felt immediately, and continues to be felt. Both participants and the leadership team expressed satisfaction with the training and the skills that were offered.

The following is excerpted from feedback provided by the site manager:

“...Content was evaluated and discussed by participants later as valid and usable; there was a lot of lunchroom discussion and carry-over of skill into the day-to-day activities both at work and at home.”

“...There were a number of benefits to our organization from this training. Getting people together forms bonds that support the workplace processes. Tolerance levels are better as folks understood communications methods used by others and how they can modify to be more accepted. There was a definite increase in self-confidence with some attendees, and some: ‘Holy cow, is that how I am coming across to people?’ There has been good lunchroom and hallway discussion on items and topics discussed during the sessions, indicating the interest levels and the importance of the topics discussed.”

Other comments from Flint about about being involved in Workplace Essential Skills training:

“The whole process made sense to us. We liked that it was not canned, but was specifically tailored to the needs of our workplace.”

“It was good to have someone from outside doing the needs assessment. Workers could be more honest since they didn’t have to speak to management. The trainer was very nice and also very direct.”

“Employees responded really well to the training. There are some really neat things happening. They are using the buzzwords in their talk around the lunchroom. They talk about viewing their conversations at home differently. Some have become more tolerant. They would really like to see some follow-up and maybe a refresher course.”

“There has been a really positive impact on our employees. There is more tolerance visible between people on the floor and between management and people on the floor. This leads to less stress. People have a better understanding of individual styles and the importance of non-verbal communication.”

## Final comments

One challenge that continually presented itself during this training was the availability of time and scheduling opportunities, as we tried to structure meetings, needs assessments, and finally the actual training around busy work schedules in the workplace. Because the leadership team of Flint Process Systems firmly believed the training would be most relevant if conducted as part of the regular work day, we had to work around production cycles and busy seasons. This challenge added an element of frustration to the process but was successfully overcome with patience and persistence from all parties.

The time commitment from Flint Process Systems employees was significant and the cost to the organization was such that it became extremely important that the training bring real value and concrete results to the organization.

Based on the feedback of the participants and the organization, that goal was accomplished.

The trainer took great care to ensure all stages of the process from initial approach, through the needs assessment, the training cycle and the various methods of evaluation, were adhered to. The trainer felt this was critical to ensure the results were valid, and therefore representative of a true Workplace Essential Skills program.

## Training tools

### Being heard... Hearing others

#### Teaching notes

#### **Communication... Why bother? (10 minutes)**

IMAGE: "Do not Discuss"

What is communication?

- Brainstorm participants' definitions of what communication is
  - one-to-one
  - directions, instructions
  - written vs. oral
  - presentations, meetings
  - talking and/or listening
- Effective communication is all about conveying your messages to other people clearly and unambiguously. It's also about receiving information that others are sending to you, with as little distortion as possible.

Doing this involves effort from both the sender of the message and the receiver. And it's a process that can be fraught with error, with messages muddled by the sender, or misinterpreted by the recipient. When this isn't detected, it can cause tremendous confusion, wasted effort and missed opportunity.

In fact, communication is only successful when both the sender and the receiver understand the same information as a result of the communication.

#### **It's all a matter of perception (35 minutes)**

Is what you think you are sending what others are receiving?

And **process**:

Problems with communication can pop up at every stage of the communication process which consists of the sender, encoding, the channel, decoding, the receiver, feedback and the context. At each stage, there is the potential for misunderstanding and confusion.

- Source...
  - As the source of the message, you need to be clear about why you're communicating, and what you want to communicate. You also need to be confident that the information you're communicating is useful and accurate.

- Message...
  - The message is the information that you want to communicate.
- Encoding...
  - This is the process of transferring the information you want to communicate into a form that can be sent and correctly decoded at the other end. Your success in encoding depends partly on your ability to convey information clearly and simply, but also on your ability to anticipate and eliminate sources of confusion (for example, cultural issues, mistaken assumptions, and missing information.)
  - A key part of this is knowing your audience: Failure to understand who you are communicating with will result in delivering messages that are misunderstood.
- Channel...
  - Messages are conveyed through channels, with verbal channels including face-to-face meetings, telephone and videoconferencing; and written channels including letters, emails, memos and reports.
  - Different channels have different strengths and weaknesses. For example, it's not particularly effective to give a long list of directions verbally, while you'll quickly cause problems if you give someone negative feedback using email.
- Decoding...
  - Just as successful encoding is a skill, so is successful decoding (involving, for example, taking the time to read a message carefully, or listen actively to it.) Just as confusion can arise from errors in encoding, it can also arise from decoding errors. This is particularly the case if the decoder doesn't have enough knowledge to understand the message.
- Receiver...
  - Your message is delivered to individual members of your audience. No doubt, you have in mind the actions or reactions you hope your message will get from this audience. Keep in mind, though, that each of these individuals enters into the communication process with ideas and feelings that will undoubtedly influence their understanding of your message, and their response. To be a successful communicator, you should consider these before delivering your message, and act appropriately.
- Feedback...
  - Your audience will provide you with feedback, as verbal and nonverbal reactions to your communicated message. Pay close attention to this feedback, as it is the only thing that can give you confidence that your audience has understood your message. If you find that there has been a misunderstanding, at least you have the opportunity to send the message a second time.
- Context...
  - The situation in which your message is delivered is the context. This may include the surrounding environment or broader culture (corporate culture, international cultures, and so on).

### **LEGO® building blocks exercise (30 minutes)**

ACTIVITY: Distribute LEGO exercise and blocks.

- 5 minutes – explanation
- 5 minutes – first trial
- 10 minutes – debrief
- 5 minutes – 2nd trial
- 5 minutes

ACTIVITY: “Keep it Real” discussion. Invite conversation about situations at work where communication has broken down. Try to find breakdowns in perception and process.

### **BREAK**

#### **Packaging the message... Encoding (20 minutes)**

Brainstorm on whiteboard for this slide.

- **Why?** Am I trying to give direction, win cooperation, provide feedback, offer support?  
Do I need a permanent record?
- **Who?** Context: Where are you/they at? Environment, noise, others watching, etc.
- **When?** Before a situation develops, when it's too late.
  - Timing: Position your message for the best retention.
- **What?** What do I really need to say? Do they need background information?
  - Positive vs. negative.
  - Keep it simple. Use clear language. Be specific.
- Main idea first for good news. Buffer first for bad news.
  - Content: Lots of instruction – write it down!
  - End with direction.

### **Communication styles**

ACTIVITY: Administer “Communication Styles Inventory”

Discuss:

- Were the results similar?
- Did the results surprise you? Why? Why not?
- How does your communication style impact your interactions?
- If you know how someone else communicates, do you change your presentation?  
Do you change your response?

Style identification: People have different styles of communication. For example, some people are aggressive, while others are more passive and analytical. Your communication style impacts how effective you are in your interactions and how others view you.

Once test takers know their styles, more training time is devoted to discussing those styles and how they interact.

One fun activity is to have members of the group guess which style each member has, to see how each person really is coming across to others. [www.ehow.com/list\\_6974862\\_effective-communication-training-activities.html](http://www.ehow.com/list_6974862_effective-communication-training-activities.html)

## **Communication blocks (45 minutes)**

IMAGE: Sphinx cartoon

ACTIVITY: Barriers to effective communication worksheet.

Brainstorm: What barriers did people identify?

IMAGE: Brick wall with barriers landing.

ACTIVITY: Conversation about barriers: Four categories identified here – what about language barriers, class/level barriers, etc.

IMAGE: Communication cycle overlaid with context elements: emotion, attitude, body language, physical environment

ACTIVITY: Communication barriers in the workplace – what types of barriers? What category do they fall into?

## **Body language (30 minutes)**

IMAGE: Various physical manifestations of body language

ACTIVITY: Have participants describe observed body language from their everyday (not work) life.

Brainstorm: What do they see?

Body language includes:

- manner of dress
- stance
- tone of voice
- eye contact
- facial expression
- hand, foot and body position
- hand movements
- personal space

ACTIVITY: Communication exercise: Read me

ACTIVITY: (Pairs)

Mirroring is an effective communication training technique. In this strategy, you attempt to copy the stance, facial expressions and overall body language of the person with whom you are communicating. The idea is that this makes you pay more attention to your partner, and that you make them more comfortable by using their own body language set. Pair off everyone in the group and allow them to mirror each other for at least two minutes. Then, have the group members tell their partner the body language cues that were most noticeable and which they tried to imitate. Have the group create new pairs, repeating the exercise.

Body language exercise: Individually, and then in pairs

### Active listening... Receiving the message (45 minutes)

Invest in listening...

- Pay attention...
  - Focus on the speaker.
  - Remove all distractions.
  - Think about what **they** are saying, not about what **you** plan to say next.
  - Be sensitive to body language – theirs and yours.
  - Take notes if you need to.
- Show that you are listening...
  - Use your own body language and gestures.
  - Turn your body toward the speaker. Lean toward the speaker.
  - Nod, smile, stay focused on them.
  - Use verbal cues: yes, un huh, OK.
- Ensure understanding...
  - Make sure you understand the message.
  - Remember perception – we all see the world in different ways.
  - Ask for clarification.
  - Ask questions. Assume nothing.
  - Summarize what you have heard.
- Defer judgment...
  - Allow the speaker to finish. If you need to, count to five before responding.
  - Don't interrupt with counter-arguments.
  - Don't get defensive.
- Respond appropriately
  - Remember: nobody wins when an argument starts.
  - Be candid, open and honest in your response.
  - Be respectful – behave toward them the way you want them to behave toward you.

Discussion: What have we discovered about how we communicate, and why communication might be breaking down?

Bring it home...

- **Package it:** we decided how to deliver it.
- **Deliver it:** we learned how to avoid communication blocks.
- **Receive it:** we learned how to listen actively.
- **Did it work?** We'll see...

### Evaluation (10 minutes)

## Resources

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- Folinsbee, S. & Jurmo, P. (1994). *Collaborative needs assessment: A handbook for workplace development planners*. ABC Canada.
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- Carlson, A. & Manktelow, J. (2007-2010). *Communicate at your best*. London: Mind Tools Ltd. Retrieved January 8, 2011 from Mind Tools website: <http://www.mindtools.com>.
- La-Vore-Fletcher, J. (2011). *DISC personality: Recognizing hot buttons to reduce conflict*. Retrieved June 25, 2011 from Christian Coaching Institute Website: <http://www.christiancoachinginstitute.com/disc-profile-life-coaching/>.

# case study

Workplace Essential Skills training

## Alberta Job Corps



## Overview

The Alberta Job Corps (AJC) program provides structured, supportive training and work experience for individuals who have a sporadic employment history. The program gives participants the opportunity to work and earn a wage while learning reliable employment skills. Participants are hired by the Ministry (Government of Alberta, Human Services) and are paid minimum wage plus employer contributions. They work on projects for their local communities and non-profit organizations. The Alberta Job Corps program is designed to work in cooperation with employers, training providers, aboriginal groups, community organizations and schools.

The Alberta Job Corps program may include:

- employment development activities
- training modules to develop employability and job skills
- an equipped work environment with the rules, procedures and expectations of the workplace
- incentives to become a “lead hand”
- job coaching
- work experience through AJC-supervised community work projects
- work experience opportunities with employers

Source: Government of Alberta <http://employment.alberta.ca/CES/3157.html>

## The needs assessment

Although the participants are technically employees, for the purpose of the case study, they will be referred to as learners. The needs assessment training materials came from team effort by the trainers to identify key questions and the publication, *Collaborative Needs Assessment: A Handbook for Workplace Development Planners*, by Folinsbee & Jurmo.

There were four individual interviews. Three interviews were conducted with AJC staff and one interview was conducted with learners. This was followed by a focus group of 10 learners (this represents 25% of the learners at AJC).

AJC staff has well-defined roles in the organization, while the learners have a limited employment with AJC (six months to one year maximum). Interviews conducted with contractors and career employment consultants suggested that there is a need for an individualized approach to training. The current training does not address the variety of barriers the learners come into the program with. The trainers focused on key Essential Skills being practiced by the learners in the in-house programs.

The new employee/learner with AJC is guided by the counselors in many meaningful ways. The trainers felt a Workplace Essential Skills workshop would support the AJC staff to better prepare the employees/learners for work placement. It gives the staff a better understanding of how to build on the strengths of the learner while they are learning.

The learners come to the organization with a range of backgrounds:

- 30-40% Aboriginal
- Many single parents
- 60% are on income support
- Learners have been out of work from six months to five years
- Many have not finished high school

A review of in-house documents was completed on the following:

- Employability assessment
- Trade essentials (welding, Numeracy, Writing and Oral Communication)
- Workplace health and safety
  - Welding safety (Alberta Learning document)
  - Safety orientation
- Registration
- Emergency information
- Policies and procedures agreement
- Front desk signs

## Questions at the interviews/focus group

### AJC overview

- Is every staff person at Alberta Job Corps an Alberta Employment and Immigration (now Human Services) employee?
- Who is your client?
- How many counselors, supervisors, instructors, contractors do you have?
- Does your business have other workplace locations?
- How much do you do for the employee and how much does the employee do for themselves?
- What type of counseling and training do you supply?
- What does a day of safety training look like?
- How do you communicate with your clients and other staff?
- What information, skills and aid do you provide to the client?
- Which occupations in the labour market are you currently working with?
- Do you shift the areas of the labour market over the years? What is the process to accommodate the labour market demands?
- Who are your community partners? Schools, trainers, Aboriginal groups? Employers?
- Do you host monthly evaluations?

- Do you assess math levels before offering math related training? Reading?
- What are your recruitment policies?
- How do you get clients “on the grid”?

### Questions for career employment counselors

- What is the counselor’s role?
- What are your proposed projects?
- What does a checklist for the clients look like?
- Do you have any behaviour strategies?
- What is a lead hand?
- Who are the mentors? What is their job?
- What are your job search techniques?
- What are the current training models for safety orientation: First Aid, WHMIS, H2S Alive, shop tools, basic carpentry and other trades

### Questions for employees/learners

- What type of job are you looking for?
- What tasks do you engage in at home or on the job?
- What important skills do you need for a job?
- How comfortable are you working on a computer?
- Do you get help with your resume?
- What do you think will be your biggest challenge in getting a job?

## Planning and delivering the training

Demographics for Introduction to Workplace Essential Skills (WES) and Plain Language workshops:

- 30% male and 60% female
- Management, career employment consultants and instructors
- Age category: 40-55 years.
- Number of participants: seven

Demographics for Now You're Cooking workshops:

- 50% male and 50% female
- Employee/learner
- Ages: 18-40 years
- Approximately 60% Aboriginal
- Employees/learners
- Time employed at AJC: four to six months

AJC staff

- Introduction to Workplace Essential Skills (three hours)
- Plain Language (three hours)

Employee/learners

- Now You're Cooking (four half-day sessions) (x2)

To create a training plan for the learners, the trainers reviewed the needs assessments data and toured the facility. Several Essential Skill training opportunities presented themselves, but in consultation with AJC staff, it was determined that Numeracy and Computer Use were the two higher priority Essential Skills to focus on. The building was equipped with a kitchen and sufficient supplies to host a workshop that would practice Numeracy and Computers Use skills, while providing other important life skills: awareness on healthy eating, shopping tips and reading nutritional labels. Staff members regularly used the kitchen to connect with the learners and were already thinking about hosting a cooking class for the learners. Taking their idea, the trainers incorporated the primary Essential Skills of Numeracy and Computer Use. The environment of this workshop naturally supported other Essential Skills: Reading, Thinking and Oral Communication, Document Use and Working with Others became secondary.

## Training outline

Workshops	Topics		
<b>Workplace Essential Skills</b>	What are Essential Skills?	Levels of complexity	Essential Skill profiles
<b>Plain Language</b>	Why plain language?	Plain language principles: Audience, purpose, jargon	Editing in plain language
<b>Now You're Cooking</b>	Numeracy	Computer Use	Healthy eating

## Evaluation

### Introduction to Workplace Essential Skills (pre-training)

Two questions were asked about WES at the beginning of the workshop:

What do you know?

- There are nine of them
- Nothing
- They are skills needed to operate and participate fully in the workforce and life, help with reading writing and math
- There is numeracy

What would you like know?

- How to access the resources
- Tips to assist our clients
- Courses and where does one go to get assessed?
- Resources for our employees such as where to go for computer skills, how to develop them
- Everything, more

Followed by a third question (post-training):

What did you learn?

- How important they are in daily activities
- To be more clear about someone's level
- Break down the Essential Skills
- Different approach to job profiles
- Better understanding of how ads and postings may not be understood by others
- The breakdown of skill levels, there are more Essential Skills than reading and writing
- Computer skills are a part of Essential Skills, there are nine Essential Skills
- Ways to identify which skills are prominent or lacking
- How to make a lobster salad
- Job profiles through HRSDC

- Essential Skills are the foundation of learning other skills
- How to categorize some basic skills into one of the nine categories (ie: keyboard skills into writing, not just technology)

### Plain language

Post-training evaluation:

- It is very important to present information at the right level to be effective. Enjoyed interacting with colleagues. Presenters are knowledgeable and passionate.
- Would like more cheat sheets for resources, printout of the PowerPoint so we can take notes as we moved along. Really enjoyed using real situations.
- The session will reinforce what we already know and added new insight.
- Employers felt it will assist them in identifying learners who may have low Essential Skills. Recognized that charts, ads, etc., are not always understood. Need to continue to be aware of level people are at. Where do we go from here? Helps understand "strengths and weakness." Also brought an awareness of the skills a person already possesses.

### Now You're Cooking: Post-training evaluation

I learned:

- How to read labels
- How to cc someone with email
- How a store was set up
- Best buy is on the bottom or top shelf in a grocery store
- Some stores price match
- Making a list before I go will keep me on track
- Price doesn't mean how good the food is
- How to weigh food
- How to choose fresh vegetables and fruit
- Problem solving = team work

All of the participants felt the class was worthwhile.

## Innovations

Workplace Essential Skills training presented many opportunities to augment the work done by Alberta Job Corps. Two suggestions for future training:

- Learners at AJC come with a variety of family circumstances that has impacted their own literacy journey. AJC can link with adult and family literacy programs. This would provide support to the children and other adults in the learners' lives.
- The current program offered by AJC is suited for developing a portfolio for the employees/learners. AJC could use the job placement training offered to the learner to build a portfolio to include: a resume, sample letters, training documentation, monthly performance reviews, employee of the month awards, extra training outside of work such as adult tutoring, mentoring achievements, photos of projects completed, and any other job related achievements

## Challenges

- Even though the AJC staff responded to the information in the workshop, we didn't see any signs of plain language practices.
- Learners came with varying levels of experience with cooking, which had an impact on how easily they could understand the material presented. Trainers planned a multi-level course layout.
- Learners also came with many different attitudes towards work.
- Comments from the learners indicated they might benefit from learning money management skills.
- Trainers observed that learners often came to the program hungry and that some of them live in poverty.

## Impacts and benefits

What AJC had to say about being involved in Workplace Essential Skills training:

"They gave clients skills they needed that AJC didn't have the expertise to do. They gave us a better awareness around how to present things, such as plain language for our signage."

"This was a really good partnership. Asking questions, giving feedback. It included all of the staff."

"Made some of our clients want to go to tutoring. One client in the program didn't know how to send an email with an attachment, now he can. He's very excited. He also looked up a fishing camp that he'd worked at and could navigate the Internet. He's about three feet off the ground with excitement! Now he's going to NorQuest for upgrading because he has the confidence that he can learn."

"What we got was awesome. We have nothing to compare it to."

"We need to put a budget case forward to have more Essential Skills training in our programs and to look at existing programs to integrate Essential Skills."

## Final comments

The skills that the learners acquire through Alberta Job Corps affects not just them, but their family, community and their prospects for long-term sustainable employment. Because the learners require a significant amount of support, Workplace Essential Skills training was able to address only the tip of the iceberg. Alberta Job Corps could become an organization that focuses on Essential Skill development. This would require a sustained effort at the management and staff level. Despite a tremendous number of barriers, including lifestyle, lack of education, and lack of positive influences, learners showed perseverance and determination.

## Training tools

### Super Teacher Worksheets

Fractions, adding fractions, adding fractions answer key, decimals  
Retrieve from [www.superteacherworksheets.com](http://www.superteacherworksheets.com)

### Now You're Cooking Work Plan

	recipes	food related lesson	math component	computer component
week 1 shopping	super fast chili Salad Ice Cream and Strawberries	<b>tour of Superstore</b> how store is organized how to choose canned foods how to choose produce how to choose meat shopping tips to save you money	Introduction to Fractions	Using Email at Work
week 2	Stir Fry salad or veg fruit crisp	<b>healthy living</b> healthy food tips for healthy living tips for feeding infants and toddlers Canada's Food Guide	Adding Fractions	
week 3	upside down shepherd's pie salad Whacky Chocolate Cake	<b>keeping food safe</b> best before date and storage times handling fresh fruit and veg danger zone safe handling of meat wash your hands often		
week 4	Fish in Pouch Salad Chocolate Pudding	how to read recipes  <b>measuring tips</b> the right tools how to measure	how to work measurements out most often used metric measurements	

week 1 shopping	recipes super fast chili dessert	food related lesson <b>tour of Superstore</b> how store is organized how to choose canned foods how to choose produce how to choose meat shopping tips to save you money	math component  calculating "best buys"	computer component  search Real Canadian Superstore write a review on yelp
Times	9-Feb flip chart, markers  <b>create grocery list</b>	8:45 arrive brief everyone on the plan for today 1. how to get the most out of this experience 2. doubling this recipe for chili 3. how to divide labour in kitchen can we have 6 people cooking at once? Cooking: choose 3 people setting tables, Cleaning: choose 3 people		
	<b>visit store Fri Jan 20 for permission to tour sto</b>	9:30 take van to Superstore general overview of store where is produce canned goods meat dairy shopping the sales	while 3 are preparing food, the other 3 can do math activity	
	divide into 2 groups each group gather certain # of items	finding best buy		
		11:00 back to AJC to prepare chili food safety - wash hands division of labour: prep and cleanup keeping leftovers	metric measurements for groceries	
			cost of this meal	

## Resources

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- Folinsbee, S, & Jurmo, P. (1994). *Collaborative needs assessment: A handbook for workplace development planners*. Toronto, ON: ABC CANADA Literacy Foundation. Retrieved from [www.nald.ca/library/research/abc/colnee/cover.htm](http://www.nald.ca/library/research/abc/colnee/cover.htm). This is a handbook for educators, managers, and union leaders who will have the responsibility for workplace development. It is useful to those who will facilitate a Workplace Needs Assessment.
- Health Canada. (2011). *Eating well with Canada's food guide: A resource for educators and communicators*. Retrieved from <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/pubs/res-educat/res-educat-eng.php>. Health Canada publication responsible for helping Canadian's improve their health.
- Literacy Alberta. (2011). *Let's talk plain language*. Calgary, AB: Author. A plain language guideline to help keep everyone safe and productive at work.
- Palomar College. (n.d.). *Common rules for filing and alphabetizing*. Retrieved from <http://daphne.palomar.edu/paris/lt100/filing.htm>. Basic rules that apply to filing systems.

## Websites

- The Learning Edge: An interactive learning-through-listening website for adult learners. You need Adobe Flash Player installed on your computer in order to use this website. [www.thewclc.ca/edge](http://www.thewclc.ca/edge)
- National Occupation Classification: Standardized language for describing the work performed by Canadians in the labour market. <http://www5.hrsdc.gc.ca/noc/english/noc/2011/welcome.aspx>
- Super Teacher Worksheets: Printable worksheets, games and teaching tools for teachers. Math, reading and writing, phonics and more. [www.superteacherworksheets.com](http://www.superteacherworksheets.com)



# case study

Workplace Essential Skills training

## First Nations Casino



## Overview

This project involved workplace training in a First Nations Casino. The casino opened in December of 2007 and was interested in the development of educational programs for its employees in the area of Essential Skills. It operates on the edge of a reserve outside a large metropolitan centre. The casino employs around 500 employees and strives to create a supportive and vibrant work environment. The casino encourages openness, integrity, responsibility and collaboration for mutual success. It believes that all of its staff members make a difference and likes to find ways to recognize their employees and their contributions accordingly. (Information taken from their website.)

## The needs assessment

The casino had been working with one of the trainers for over three years on another project to develop workplace learning circles curricula. An extensive needs assessment utilizing the Office of Literacy and Essential Skills' Organizational Needs Assessment had been conducted prior to the development of the curricula and the workplace learning sessions had been piloted in the casino. The material was then revised based on the feedback from the casino staff and the learners that participated in the pilots.

Thus when the two trainers went into the casino for this new initiative, they had the advantage of knowing a lot about the casino and its learning needs. However, the trainers recognized that a further review of the learning needs should be undertaken. Meetings were arranged with the human resource team, the supervisors of the workers who the new program was going to target, and the learners themselves. All groups were interviewed so that the trainers could identify any challenges the employees were having and the Essential Skills that needed to be worked on. The trainers were also permitted to tour the various departments of the casino to help them learn more about the work environment and the jobs the staff were performing.

In addition, because of the good relationship between the trainers and human resource department, after the launch of the classes the trainers continued to learn more about the needs of their participants. The human resource assistant kept in touch with supervisors and let the trainers know of any newly identified needs or any suggestions about content that the supervisors and human resource department had.

## Employer interview questions

Please review the Office of Literacy and Essential Skills' "What are Essential Skills?" document that we have given you.

- Which of the Essential Skills listed on this document are most important in your employees' work?
- Have you an example you can give me about how they are struggling with a particular Essential Skill? How is that skill used in their job?
- What do you think it is most important for us to teach them in our Essential Skills training? Why?
- Describe any related training that you have offered in the workplace.
- Let's go through each of the Essential Skills in the document and have you describe to us how these Essential Skills are each used in your workplace. Also, can you tell us any challenges the employees are having with the particular Essential Skill we are talking about?
- Can we have access to any documents or forms that your employees have to work with on a daily basis?
- Anything else you would like to tell us? Any other concrete examples you can give us?
- Can we go on a tour of the workplace so we can learn more about the jobs here?

## Employee interview questions

Hi, I am xxxx and I am doing a needs assessment around what some of the training needs might be in your casino, so I will be asking you a bunch of questions to try and understand your job a little better and the work that is done here. Everything you tell me is confidential. We won't identify what you have said to anyone. We will only give them general information about what we have learned.

- Can you tell me a little bit about yourself? Do you have family? Kids?
- How long have you worked here? Why did you choose to work at this casino?
- Can you describe your job to me?
- What do you like most about your job? What do you like the least?
- Is there any special training you need for your job?
- Can you walk me through a typical day for you? What do you do? Are there any special skills you need for this job? (Prompt for Essential Skills.)
- We are looking at something called Essential Skills. Do you know what Essential Skills are? Essential Skills are the skills you need to do your job and do things in your everyday life.
- I will ask you about Essential Skills and how they relate to your job:
  - Reading: Can you give me an example of when you use reading in your job? Any other ways you use reading? What are some of the challenges on your job when someone doesn't read well?
  - Writing: Can you give me an example of how you use writing in your job? Any other places you need writing skills? What problems can happen in your job when someone does not write well?
  - Document Use: What kinds of documents are there in your jobs? Can you describe them to me? What challenges are there with those documents? Do you find them clear? Do you have any suggestions on how to change those documents to make them easier to complete or fill out?
- Continuous Learning: What changes on your job? What do you have to keep learning about? What kind of training do you take to keep up with things? What would you like to learn about next?
- Numeracy: Is math important in your job? What kinds of things do you have to know how to do with math in your job? Can you give me some example of things that you would have to use your math skills for in your job? What happens if something is done wrong when someone uses math to do your job?
- Working with Others: Do you have to work with others a lot in your job? Do you like that or not? How do you work together with others in your job to get a task done?
- Oral Communication: Do you have to talk to a lot of people in your jobs? Are there times when people who do your kind of job don't understand other people in the job?
- Problem Solving: What kinds of problems do you have to solve in your job? How do you go about solving them? Can you go to other people if you have a problem to solve? How do they help you?
- Computer Use: Do you use computers in your job? How do you use them? Do you like working on computer? What would you like to learn more about with the computers?
- What problems can arise in your job if you don't know how to do a job well?
- What would be the best way to train someone for your job?
- What kind of training do you think people should have to do their daily work better?
- Do you think you will stay here a long time? Why?
- Do you have any safety concerns? Anything that worries you about working here or anything you would like improved?
- What skills would you like to learn?
- Anything else you would like to tell me about your job?

Thank you.

## Planning and delivering the training

Two possible areas of training were identified during the needs assessment phase. One area was with a group of employees who wanted more training in customer service. As the gaming industry can have customers who are unhappy when they lose and difficult to deal with, the casino wanted to ensure that the employees had strategies in place to deal with difficult customers. They were also interested in improving communication and Working with Others skills of their employees.

In the customer services area, it was decided to design three workshops to deliver to the employees. Topics included dealing with difficult people, anger management, problem-solving and conflict resolution. The Essential Skills targeted were: Working with Others, Oral Communication and Thinking skills.

The original idea was to deliver the workshops to the same group for three sessions, but when the workshops were delivered that was not what happened. A different group of participants showed up for each class with one or two returning participants. This was related to outside factors in the casino like workers having to work overtime, other workers just learning about the program and unexpected family concerns. The group was a mixture of high ESL learners and mainstream learners. Workshops were attended by both men and women, and all of the participants were from the gaming department.

The second area of training was for a group of ESL learners with limited English. These workers were struggling quite a bit in the workplace because their English was not strong enough for them to understand instructions, read notices, communicate with supervisors and co-workers, etc. The Essential Skills targeted included: Reading, Writing, Oral Communication, and Document Use.

Document use was a particular area of concern as the workers were struggling to read the work schedule, fill out time-sheets, read the notices on the bulletin board, understand human resource policies, and so on. Workshops were three hours long and attracted both men and women. The first series of sessions attracted a wide range of ESL learners. In the second

series of lessons, the trainers decided to work with only those participants with the very lowest level of skills. This allowed them to provide the targeted group of learners with more intensive support and design the lessons more specifically around their needs.

In order to find materials that were appropriate for the group the trainers utilized materials from a wide variety of sources. As the group had very limited English skills, they were unable to work with many of the materials already created for Essential Skills and English as a Second Language development. The trainers found that authentic workplace materials worked the best and also working with actual scenarios that related directly to the employee's own particular job in the casino.

The human resource department was very helpful and continuously advised on issues that the learners were experiencing in the workplace. The department obtained this information by talking to the supervisors and relaying the information back to the trainers. They also were very helpful with regards to supplying the instructors with numerous documents that were used in the workplace. As a result, at least a third of each class was spent working with those documents.

In the beginning, the learners were not confident enough to speak up about what they wanted to learn in the sessions, but after five or six sessions they began to tell the trainers more about what they would like to learn and the instructors were able to tailor sessions to the employees' workplace learning needs.

One of the more effective strategies for working with this group was to go out into the casino and have learners write down words that they did not understand. The casino gave permission for the class to do this; Monday mornings were ideal because the casino was not too busy. In addition, the learners and the facilitators would take a tour past the employee bulletin board to see if there were any notices they did not understand and words that they wanted to learn.

A variety of delivery modes were used and activities were alternated so that the learners could concentrate on one part of their learning at a time, like writing answers to questions or reading a short passage. They worked individually, in pairs, in small groups and participated also as a large group in discussions and activities. As there were two trainers, they were able to give the learners more individualized support so that if one trainer was teaching the other trainer could be walking around and assisting those who needed a little more help.

Thanks to the support of the casino, this initiative resulted in 22 training events in the workplace and over 25 learners participated. Sessions were successfully tailored to the needs of the particular group the trainers were working with at the time. The learners were excited, dedicated and hard working. They rarely missed a class if they could help it and always asked for the sessions to continue.

## Evaluation

On-going evaluation was an important part of the training developed for the casino. As the trainers were working with a new group of learners, many of whom had never taken workplace training before, it was important to collect as much evaluative feedback as possible. This was done in a number of ways. Written evaluations were done after every group of sessions (usually four to six sessions) by the learners. Written evaluations proved to be the least effective method for collecting information about the classes as the learners had such limited English it was a struggle for them to complete them. Other methods of evaluation were more effective, such as having a summative verbal evaluation after a block of sessions with the learners. Their verbal skills were stronger than their written skills so they were able to articulate more clearly what they needed and wanted to learn. Also, informal chats with them throughout the class about how things were going and what they wanted to learn was very informative once they gained the confidence to speak up. In addition, the human resource personnel kept in contact with the supervisors of the learners. They reported on what improvements the supervisors were seeing in the workplace and any challenges that the workers were having. Sessions were adjusted based on this feedback.

The formative and summative evaluation processes undertaken throughout led to the creation of relevant training with many successful outcomes. The learners and their supervisors reported significant improvement in the employees' skills in areas of Oral Communication, Document Use and Working with Others. The learners reported more confidence on the job and also that they spent more time practicing their English.

## Innovation

An innovative part of the program was the blending of materials and teaching strategies from a wide variety of sources. For example, family literacy materials were modified for the workplace and used in the classroom. The trainers used online teaching resources by linking up their laptop to the Internet and incorporating authentic materials from the workplace wherever possible. Having two trainers with differing styles allowed them to use the strengths of each to facilitate the sessions and to provide more individualized support to learners.

Also, working hand-in-hand with the human resource department is innovative as it is rare that a trainer(s) can have such a close relationship with the employer and get first hand information about the strengths and weaknesses of their learners. A great deal of credit should be given to the casino who allowed free access to the workplace so that the instructors could better understand the work of the learners and the casino operations. This access allowed the trainers to learn much more about the workplace environment than they would have otherwise if the casino had not been such a welcoming workplace.

## Challenges

There were no major challenges encountered with the delivery of the workplace training sessions. The fact that one of the trainers had a previous relationship with the employer assisted the training to run smoothly built on a past relationship of trust. In addition, the employer already believed in the importance of workplace training initiatives and understood what the trainers were trying to accomplish. The most challenging thing for the trainers was finding materials that met the limited English skills of the learners and were relevant to the particular workplace. Once the trainers identified the level of the learners it was easier and the use of authentic workplace materials assisted them in meeting the needs of the learners.

Once in awhile the workers were tired because they had worked a late shift or had just come off shift, but for the most part they persevered when that was the case and soon became engaged in their learning.

## Impact and benefits

The training initiative was a success. Learners, casino staff and the trainers all reported improved skills in the employees. Comments from learners indicated that they wanted to learn more, felt more confident in the workplace and were able to do a better job. The learners indicated that they would spend more time studying English and that they wanted more workplace training.

The customer service group that attended the three stand-alone workshops indicated that they now felt more confident about the strategies they were using in the workplace, the workshops reaffirmed in their conflict management techniques and they felt better equipped to understand their co-workers and supervisors.

The greatest success was achieved by the basic ESL group with limited skills. Once their confidence was built, they could speak up about what they wanted to know and ask questions of co-workers and supervisors where previously they had been reluctant to do so. In addition, they were more likely to take a risk and speak in English even when they were struggling to find the right words or unsure how to pronounce something. Their confidence and desire to read and write English increased too.

## Final comments

This First Nations Casino practiced what it preached by having a supportive and vibrant workplace environment and by striving to offer relevant workplace training. Their openness to the trainers and the learners' needs allowed the initiative to be successful and encouraged the employees to get excited about learning English and practicing their Essential Skills. The trainers, casino staff and, most importantly, the learners collaborated together to design a successful program that clearly met the needs of employees. Further evidence of success is illustrated by the fact the learners want the classes to continue at the casino and continue to work on their English outside of their scheduled classes.

## Training tools

### Sample lesson plans

#### Basic ESL and Essential Skills class

1. Icebreaker – Ask learners to line up across the room according to their birthday without talking to each other. One end of the line is January; the other end of the line is December. Using nonverbal communication, the learners are to situate themselves on the line. When the learners are comfortable about where they are on the line, ask them to tell you their birthdays starting with January and moving on down the line. Encourage learners to move to another spot if they are in the wrong spot. Debrief how that felt to not be able to speak to others. Why is communication so important in the workplace?
2. Map – A warm place I would rather be. Place a large map on the wall. Give each person a sticky dot and have them place their sticker on the map for where they would like to be. Encourage them to tell you why they choose that location.
3. Walk about the casino – Give each participant a clipboard, pen and some paper. With permission from the casino, take the students on a walk about. Encourage them to write down any words displayed in the casino they don't understand. Also have them describe their jobs to you. Take a stroll past the bulletin boards to see if there are any notices or memos the learners want to go through. Encourage them again to write down any words they don't understand. When you return to the classroom, have students take turns writing new words on the flipchart and ask the learners in the group to explain what the word means, if they know. The trainer should explain any words the students don't know and use it in a sentence.
4. Document Use – Simple forms. Make copies of any authentic workplace forms you have secured from the casino. Forms can also be scanned and put on a laptop to display so you can review them visually as they are working on them. Distribute the simplest forms of the ones you have collected to your class and have them walk through filling out the form. Discuss the layout of the form, any words they don't understand, and why the forms are important to their workplace.
5. The Chans move to Calgary – Practicing their writing, have the learners copy the passage into their journals while filling in the blanks in the story. Have the learners read the story out loud together when they are done. (Taken from CLB 1 – LAPS ESL, Page 7)
6. Picture Dictionary – Using a picture dictionary, have the learners look for pictures in the book that relate to their job. Have them write on the flipchart words they did not know until they looked them up in the book. Have the others in the group discuss what each word means.
7. How do we communicate? – Relating back to the icebreaker activity, discuss with the students the various ways we communicate in our jobs.
8. Good day/bad day – Discuss with the students what makes for a good day on their job and what makes for a bad day. Using the handout, have them write or draw how they can turn a bad day into a good day. (Taken from ESL-LAPS, page 51)
9. Homework – Bring a picture from home for next week's class. It can be a picture of the learner's family or home country. It should be something they would like to write about or talk about next week.

## ESL level 2

1. Welcome – Tongue twister
2. Map activity – Conversation about maps. Each learner is given a map.
  - Using the index find \_\_\_\_\_.
  - Looking at the map find G-9.
3. Listening activity
  - News Clips – Peace Bridge  
<http://www.calgarysun.com/videos>
  - Instructions and Directions  
<http://caw.aaca-boston.org/>
4. Idioms
  - What does the word “idiom” mean?
  - Listen and read idioms.
  - Write the phrase and the meaning down.  
<http://www.idiomsite.com/>  
<http://www.wikihow.com/Understand-Canadian-Slang>
5. Document Use
  - Sign-in form
  - Comment forms
  - Casino shift switch/Pickup/Give-away Form
6. Conversation – Types of reading materials found in the home
  - Newspapers
  - Books
  - Magazines
  - Computer
  - Flyers
7. Homework – Bring in reading material from home
8. What would you like to learn next week?

## Resources

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- Workplace Education Manitoba. (2009). *Navigating Workplace Documents: The Thinking Process*. Retrieved from: <http://wem.mb.ca/uploads/PDFs/resources/navigating%20Workplace%20Documents.pdf>

## Websites

- Learning Edge – Workplace Issues: [www.thewclc.ca/edge/](http://www.thewclc.ca/edge/)
- English Express – Human Rights, Trades in Alberta: <http://aet.alberta.ca/englishexpress/issue.asp>
- LearningLinks Resource Centre: [www.learninglinkslibrary.ca/](http://www.learninglinkslibrary.ca/)
- ESL Lab: <http://www.esl-lab.com/time.htm>
- Canadian Slang: <http://www.wikihow.com/index.php?title=Understand-Canadian-Slang&action=submit>
- Idioms: <http://www.idiomsite.com/>
- Asian American Civic Association: Communicating at work, instructions and directions: <http://caw.aaca-boston.org/>



# case study

Workplace Essential Skills training

## Sawridge Inn and Conference Centre Jasper



## Overview

The Sawridge Inns and Conference Centres were founded by the Sawridge Cree First Nation of Slave Lake, Alberta, in 1972. In the development of its hotels, the Sawridge Group embraced its native heritage, beliefs and values with genuine hospitality and a strong respect for the environment. With over 600 employees across the chain, each property is recognized as an Employer of Choice.

The Sawridge Inn and Conference Centre Jasper was opened in 1983. The hotel employs up to 130 workers during high season, 60 percent of which are new immigrants or foreign workers.

The company website, [www.sawridgejasper.com](http://www.sawridgejasper.com), states that “the recipe for their success contains four key ingredients: to provide excellent customer service, to value their staff, to treat suppliers as partners and to support the communities in which they live.”

With a strong commitment to protecting the environment, the Sawridge Inn and Conference Centre is a proud recipient of the Four Green Key Rating. This rating indicates that the hotel has shown national industry leadership and commitment to protecting the environment through wide-ranging policies and practices.

Recognized as an Employer of Choice by the Alberta Hotel and Lodging Association for the last four years, the Sawridge Inn and Conference Centre Jasper offers an opportunity for people to work in a deluxe resort hotel property while enjoying the beauty and outstanding recreation that Jasper and the Canadian Rockies has to offer. They strive to be the employer of choice by providing a good working environment, and by extending further opportunities for development and growth.

For more information on the Sawridge Inn and Conference Centre Jasper, visit [www.sawridgejasper.com](http://www.sawridgejasper.com).

Information on the Sawridge Inn and Conference Centre was collected from the following websites: [www.sawridge.com/Portals/\\_default/Skins/sawridge/tabid/247/Default.aspx](http://www.sawridge.com/Portals/_default/Skins/sawridge/tabid/247/Default.aspx)  
[www.nbdm.ca/blog/sawridges-40-year-legacy](http://www.nbdm.ca/blog/sawridges-40-year-legacy)

## The needs assessment

A needs assessment was conducted over a period of six weeks at the hotel. The assessment focused primarily on aspects of communication that had been identified by management and the Workplace Essential Skills (WES) committee. A variety of tools were used in the needs assessment. The WES practitioner met with various individuals and groups from all departments of the hotel.

The assessment tools used included:

- Organizational Needs Assessment – HRSDC
- Oral Communication Self Assessment – HRSDC
- Working with Others Self Assessment – HRSDC
- Workplace Survey Assessment – HRSDC
- Workplace Checklist – HRSDC
- Review of job profiles for specific occupations to determine the skill gaps

Several methods of data collection were used in various focus groups:

- A staff meeting with all employees to provide an overview of Workplace Essential Skills. An Oral Communication and Working with Others self-assessment was completed by all attendees. Approximately 70 staff attended this meeting and represented all departments of the hotel.
- Five focus groups were conducted with staff from housekeeping, maintenance, kitchen, food and beverage, and the front desk. Participants were selected by department managers and included individuals who were proficient in their occupation and others who had skill gaps.
- Five employees were identified by management for individual interviews and represented all departments of the hotel.
- A document review was conducted. Specific documents included job descriptions, staff newsletters and orientation documents.
- A site visit was completed. The practitioner focused on reviewing the print materials posted in staff areas as 60 percent of the hotel's workforce are English Language Learners.

## Individual interview questions

Participants were provided with information on the purpose of our meeting and a brief overview of the Workplace Essential Skills training. The WES practitioner reviewed occupation specific Essential Skills profiles prior to meeting with the individual in order to gain a better understanding of the position.

- What is your job position?
- How long have you been in your current position?
- Describe a typical work day for you from the beginning to the end of your shift.

Using the nine Essential Skills, individuals were asked to identify specific job duties required for each skill.

- What training have you been provided with for this position? How was the training delivered?
- Are there systems that could be improved in your department to increase efficiency? If so, what?
- What skills are most important for you to do your job?
- What training would be of most benefit to you in your position?

Human Resource Manager (HRM):

- What is covered in the staff orientation for new employees?
- How is training provided for each position?
- Is there a high staff turnover here? If so, why? If not, what keeps them here?
- What initiatives do you have in place to maintain staff morale and loyalty to the company?

## Focus group questions

It was important to gain trust with the group prior to moving into the assessment. A project overview was provided, the anonymity of our discussions, and the purpose of the focus group was reviewed. All information gathered was recorded on a flipchart for the benefit of participants.

Each focus group began with a brief overview of the Essential Skills. Then the group moved into describing

work processes under each Essential Skill. This provided the WES practitioner with great insight in the specifics of each occupation. Once this information was complete, we then moved into specific questions.

- What is the most challenging part of your job?
- Are there glitches in written or oral communication? If so, what?
- What makes your job more difficult?
- What systems or work processes could be improved to increase efficiency?
- Is there training that would help you do things better, more efficiently?
- What areas do you feel your department needs more training in to provide better service or improve work processes?
- What training is currently provided? How is it delivered?
- How do you learn new tasks?
- Do you require specific training that would improve the quality of your work?

## Objectives of training identified

Based on initial meetings with management and the WES Working Group at the Sawridge Inn, communication was identified as an Essential Skill that required improvement. Further needs assessment with various individuals and groups from all departments supported management's recommendations for training. Based on the needs, the Essential Skill training focused on Oral Communication and Writing. The training was developed to benefit entry-level and front line workers.

The language training program was expected to improve staff's ability to communicate with guests in a more professional manner and to improve communication within departments.

The core objectives for the training initiatives were to:

- improve the language skills of immigrants and temporary foreign workers
- improve the written skills of employees
- increase the ability of employees to communicate clearly with guests and co-workers

## Target groups for training

Training was primarily developed to benefit entry-level and front line workers. Department managers were asked to identify individuals who would benefit from the training. Most of the staff who participated in training were new immigrants and temporary foreign workers. Participants who attended the ESL program were from various departments of the hotel.

The Oral Communication and Writing workshops were delivered to a variety of employees who held various positions in the hotel. The workshops targeted the needs of entry-level workers. In a few of the workshops, there were a wide range of multi-level learners, including some from management. This proved to be challenging for the facilitator and did not meet the needs of managers.

All of management and administration attended the plain language workshop.

Class sizes ranged between six and 12 employees.

## Planning and delivering the training

Once the needs assessment was completed, a report of the findings and recommendations was prepared and presented to the WES committee. The committee determined how to best use the training time allotted for their employees. The needs assessment showed that the primary areas for Essential Skills training were:

- Oral Communication
- Writing
- Continuous Learning

Other areas of skill development identified included team building, Working with Others, and one-on-one coaching to enhance literacy skills. Management also identified a desire to establish a mentoring program. We were not able to deliver all of the training that was identified due to time limitations.

Consultations with the human resource manager and the trainer determined the training format and the dates and time of training. The training schedule was circulated to department managers. They selected the employees for each of the workshops.

It was agreed that employees would most benefit from training in Oral Communication and Writing.

Employees that participated in the training:

- new immigrants or Temporary Foreign Workers from Philippines, Mexico, Japan, Serbia, Lithuania and Chile
- most were English Language Learners
- between the ages of 19 and 63
- few were Canadian Born
- more females than males attended training
- had worked at the hotel between six months and four years

The WES training that was delivered was classroom based and focused on improving communication skills, both oral and written.

The learning began with a three-hour plain language workshop. This was delivered to management and focused on enhancing current skills using a clear communication approach to written documents. Small group activities allowed participants to practice developing plain language documents. One learner remarked that this helped him to understand how to better communicate within the workplace. Another manager reported that the workshop was informative, with good pointers, and that she was able to use the skills learned right away.

Training then focused on Oral Communication and Writing workshops. A 30 hour ESL program was delivered over the period of five weeks. Learners attended class twice a week, three hours per session.

Three-hour workshops were offered twice in:

- presentation skills
- oral communication and cultural norms
- mechanics of grammar and writing

The skill gap or need for improvement that was identified in the needs assessment guided the development of the content for each workshop. For example, the English Language Learning (ELL) program focused on the needs identified, which included improved Oral Communication, improved pronunciation, use of correct tenses and understanding of idioms. Many hours were spent on the various pronunciation problems. The class focused on the mechanics and physical articulators of sound making. There were common problems with particular sounds such as *th*, *r*, *l*, *p* and *f*. The skill of being conscious of how to make the sound improved the speaking as well as the listening of ELL students. The tongue twisters were also a part of practicing newly learned pronunciation. Some time was spent on idioms and phrasal verbs as the students were often confused by the use of idioms and phrasal verbs of native speakers.

## Evaluation

Evaluations were collected both in written form and verbally. Evaluations for each workshop (5) were completed by all participants.

Ongoing verbal evaluation of the learning with participants in the English Language Learning program allowed us to address specific needs of learners. With the benefit of more time, the facilitator was able to adapt the curriculum to meet specific needs of learners. We did not have the same benefit with shorter workshops as the course objectives were set based on the needs assessment.

The trainer was in contact with the human resource manager on an ongoing basis and was able to gather feedback on how training was going and if there were areas of training that were less effective than others. This helped to guide the type of training that was being delivered over the five-week period.

An evaluation was completed with the management at the end of the pilot project. When asked what the benefits were for workers who attended the WES training, these are some of the responses that were provided:

- staff who attended training have increased self-confidence
- enhanced communication skills have improved guest services
- morale of staff has improved
- great team-building exercise
- improved communication skills

Evaluation was beneficial both to the trainer and to management. Both parties were able to evaluate the impact of training based on the progress of the learners. In addition, it helped to identify areas that required further training. Learners were able to evaluate their personal growth as a result of the training and identify where more training was needed.

## Participant evaluation

Age:  18 – 29 years  30 – 45 years  46 – 63 years

Female  Male

How satisfied were you with this workshop? (circle one)    Very satisfied    Satisfied    Not satisfied

Please explain.

Will what you learned in this course help you with your current position?

How did you benefit from this course?

Comments regarding the instructor.

What additional training or learning do you require?

## Management evaluation

What prompted you to participate in this project?

Were you aware of Workplace Essential Skills (WES) before this project?

What was it about WES training that interested you?

Were you satisfied with the needs assessment process? Were there any surprises?  
Were there any glitches?

Were the results of the needs assessment valuable to you?

Did the assessment process accurately indicate the areas of need?

Did it help you to determine who would best benefit from the training provided?

How was training organized in the company – release time, employees' own use of time, company paid time? Why was this method used?

Did the training schedule work for you?

How have your employees responded to the training?

Were you satisfied with the methods of evaluation?

What changes have you noticed in your workforce since the WES training?

Do you see the benefit of repeating this training or providing additional training in specific areas?

Would you be interested in working with the WES practitioner once the training ends? Why or why not?

Is there any other training you would like?

## Innovations

Innovative learning approaches used in the delivery of training included:

- organic modules in the English Language Learning Program
- activities and exercises that related to workplace scenarios
- flexible teaching methods and activities
- program content linked to practical needs in the work environment

## Challenges

Scheduling large numbers of employees for the workshops proved to be difficult as house counts fluctuated during the training period.

Multi-level learners attended some of the writing workshops. The diverse needs of learners proved to be challenging for the instructor. In hindsight, a clear outline of the objectives and the intended target group would have benefited managers in selecting employees appropriately for the specific workshops.

Lessons learned include targeting needs assessment and training in the employer's slow time period. The project was started in November and was interrupted because of the high volume of business and staff demand due to holidays and conferences. Assessment and training was completed between peak times. Due to the tight timelines of the project, we had a lot of work to complete in condensed periods of time.

## Impacts and benefits

Impacts and benefits of the training initiatives are evidenced through the observations and anecdotes of supervisors and management at the Sawridge Inn and Conference Centre. Managers report that Oral Communication skills have improved.

Managers have a better understanding of the importance of clear communication and writing for the intended target audience. The general manager has expressed interest in establishing an employee committee that would provide feedback on documents intended for employee communication.

Management is exploring the possibility of implementing an on-site English language training program to further support employees in their language development. We have also discussed the possibility of establishing a workplace volunteer tutor program using peers as tutors or mentors.

## Final comments

It was apparent through the needs assessment that employees of the Sawridge Inn and Conference Centre were very loyal to the company. As a result, learners were keen and worked hard to improve their workplace skills during the training.

The workplace Essential Skills pilot at this hotel was a positive experience and was well received by managers and employees. It was apparent from the feedback collected that learners enjoyed the training and the quality of facilitation. Many expressed an interest in ongoing training, especially in language development.

By supporting new and existing employees to attend training, the Sawridge Inn and Conference Centre has increased employee skills, and improved the morale and confidence of staff.

The WES practitioner has had preliminary discussions with management to continue the delivery of an on-site ELL program and to establish a peer-led volunteer tutor program.

## Training tools

### Sample lesson plan 1

This is a three-hour session.

#### Lesson objectives

- Pronunciation: focused practice on problem areas
- Conversation: idioms/workplace conversation
- Presentation: expressing ideas, opinions, feelings

#### Lesson plan

- Welcome learners
- Icebreaker games
- Introduction: “All about me” writing exercise: introducing self-expression: likes, dislikes, hopes, wants, needs etc. Use the sentence starter prompt to help students.

#### Presentation skills

- Take some time to present examples on how to introduce self and others.
- Expand the introduction lesson: introduce self/take notes and introduce classmates: take the sentence starter prompt sheet and take notes on partner’s information.
- Introduce presentation skills: Short overview of voice, body language and speed.
- Practice introduction again after revising the material and applying the presentation skills.
- Expand the lesson of how to introduce other subjects, a book, movie, band song sport teams, etc.

#### Goal identification

- Have learners take a blank piece of paper and write short-term and long-term goals.
- Explain to learners that you want them to write the short- and long-term goals in regards to improving English language skills. Help them by giving examples. Advise them to be specific about the goals they want to achieve. Encourage them to think in regards to pronunciation, conversation skills, vocabulary, and writing skills/ grammar.
- Give students time to write.

- Discuss the flipchart work: talk about the goals and write on the flipchart. Allow the students to express their needs in the above four categories.
- Start a conversation about what difficulties the students face due to the lack of skills in the above categories.
- Share experiences and solutions on how other students have dealt with such problems.
- Discuss commonalities and prioritize the needs.
- This is an important process for the instructor to gauge and to develop the goals that are achievable within the time frame given for this project. The mixed levels of the students make this very necessary.

**Pronunciation** Clear Speech. Judy B. Gilbert. Cambridge University Press

- Introduce mechanics of sounds, identify articulators: the importance of awareness of physical tools in making sounds such as lips, teeth, gum ridge, jaw, throat, vocal cords, tongue, lungs, soft and hard palate.
- Introduce some specific sounds that are problematic to make: r, l, th, s, z, p, v.
- Paired practice: students practice with partners taking turns watching and listening to each other to monitor each other's pronunciation.
- Practice tongue twisters individually and then paired practice.
- The teacher makes rounds and monitors the students individually and corrects any problem areas.

**Conversation** Idioms for Everyday Use. Milada Brukal National Textbook Company

- Introduce theme-based idioms: For examples idioms related to colours: the black market, feeling blue, green with envy, red carpet, etc.
- Introduce meanings and examples on appropriate uses.
- Give students time to finish the exercise and correct together as a class.
- The students write one or two examples of each idiom of their own.
- The students share their examples. Students are asked to think of situations where the idioms may be used in their work place.
- Introduce a few phrasal verbs: go after, give away, get rid of, look for, look into, etc.
- Follow the same procedure as above.

**Review, Q and A, homework**

- Review the material covered, answer any questions regarding the material and give homework.
- Homework: the students were asked to think about and write some cultural differences in the Canadian work place and the workplaces in their home country.
- Students were also asked to think about and write any customs in Canada they did not understand etc.

## Sample lesson plan 2

Note: This is a three-hour session.

### Lesson objectives

- Writing: basic sentence structure/writing to give information
- Conversation/ cultural awareness/idioms
- Pronunciation

### Lesson plan

- Welcome learners
- Review last session material ; pronunciation, idioms, phrasal verbs, etc.
- Introduce short exercise in “thinking in English.” Ask impromptu questions on times tables, such as “2x2 is?” Encourage the students to answer without “translating.”

### Conversation

Communicative Grammar Practice. Leo Jones University of Cambridge Press  
Idioms for Everyday Use. Milada Brukal National Textbook Company

- Remind the students about the homework given in previous class.
- Students are asked to talk about situations where it was difficult to understand instructions from managers, supervisors or co-workers.
- Discuss what the situation was and what was the problem? Lack of vocabulary? Did idioms cause problems? Assumption of knowledge by the other party?
- Divide into small groups , hand out flipchart page.
- Invite the students to think about similar situations they encountered and how it was handled.
- Instruct the students to discuss how different people handled the situation.
- Use the flipchart to write down different situations the students have encountered.
- The group presents their results to the class.
- Discuss if the difference in workplace etiquette or culture in Canada and their home country may have caused some of the problems.
- Introduce communicative grammar lessons regarding giving advice/suggestions and requests and obligation.
- Discuss how to give clear and correct instructions.
- GAME: clear instruction giving: blindfold partners and lead them through the obstacle course.
- Review/evaluate how to give clear and correct instructions.
- Discuss the partner’s performance in giving instructions to the partner being led.

- Relate this to the workplace: if they encounter difficult situations to ask for clarification, polite way of asking questions, etc.
- Introduce idioms related to workplace.
- Introduce meanings and examples of appropriate uses.
- Give students time to finish the exercise and correct together as a class.
- The students write one or two examples of each idiom of their own.
- The students share their examples. Students are asked to think of situations where the idioms may be used in their workplace.
- Introduce a few phrasal verbs.
- Follow the same procedure as above.

### **Pronunciation** Clear Speech. Judy B. Gilbert. Cambridge University Press

- Review past lesson regarding the sounds.
- Practice the pronunciation.
- Introduce syllables/intonation.
- Practice 1-4 syllable words, practice intonation and basic patterns of word, phrase and sentence intonations.
- Give students time to do the exercise.
- Correct the exercise together as a class.
- Practice tongue twisters.

### **Writing** Skills Practice Book, The Book Society of Canada Limited

- Introduce basic sentence structure.
- Give students to do exercise/do the correction together.
- Practice writing simple and combined sentences.
- Give students to do the exercises/do the correction together.
- Introduce: giving information in “who, what, where ,when, why and how.”
- Adding details such as use of adjective and adverbs.
- Give time to do the exercises/do the correction together.

### **Review, Q and A, homework**

- Review lesson materials and answer any questions
- Homework: Give students writing assignments in form of journal entry. Give the students a theme to write, and to incorporate the idioms, and new vocabulary learned in the class, as well as use the lesson learned in the writing portion of the class.

## Resources

- Boardman, C. A., & Frydenberg, J. (2001). *Writing to Communicate, Paragraphs and Essays*. Longman Press, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition.
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- Rozakis, L. (1999). *Complete Idiot's Guide to Public Speaking, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*. Alpha Books Press: Indianapolis, IN.
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Communication Series National Press Publications.
- Yates, J. (1999). *The Ins and Outs of Prepositions: A Guidebook for ESL Students*. Barron's Educational Series.

## Online resources

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- N.W.T. Literacy Council. (n.d.). *Write for your reader: A plain language handbook*. Retrieved from <http://www.nald.ca/library/learning/nwt/writread/cover.htm>
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- Tips and Techniques: Toastmasters International*. Retrieved March 2, 2012. <http://www.toastmasters.org/mainmenucategories/freeresources/needhelpgivingaspeech/tipstechniques.aspx>
- Tips for Developing Materials (nd)*. Retrieved January 8, 2012. <http://www.measureup.towes.com/english/devmaterials.asp>
- Tongue Twisters for Pronunciation (nd)*. Retrieved March 2, 2012. <http://www.download-esl.com/tonguetwisters/easy/easytongue.html>
- Tools and Resources (nd)*. Retrieved November 4, 2011. <http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/eng/workplaceskills/LES/tools>