

The Benefits of Improving Literacy Skills in the Workplace

The evidence is clear. Regardless of their position - whether company owners, human resources managers, labour representatives, or program participants themselves - the feedback is the same: workplace basic skills programs work.

The Workplace Education Centre, a former division of ABC CANADA, commissioned an independent study of the impact of basic skills education on Canadian workplaces.

The study consisted of in-depth phone interviews with 86 individuals from 53 workplaces that have had basic skills programs for at least one year. Sixty percent of the individuals interviewed were employer representatives and 40% were employee representatives.

The Impact of Basic Skills Programs on Canadian Workplaces is the largest study of its kind in North America and is part of a growing body of evidence which documents the dramatically positive impacts of workplace basic skills training in Canada. (See also the Conference Board of Canada's study, *The Economic Benefits of Improving Literacy Skills in the Workplace*.)

Why do basic skills programs work?

Workplace basic skills programs work because employees who participate in them increase their levels of self-confidence, acquire new skills, and believe that they are valued by their workplaces.

Increased Self-confidence - 97% of respondents report that basic skills programs increase the confidence levels of program participants in ways that benefit the workplace.

"People develop self-confidence . . . it snowballs from there. Some people have felt able to bid for a new job . . . it wasn't the education per se but they were able to put themselves forward." - *Sandy Byrnes, Vice-President of UFCW, on Education Committee, Johnson and Johnson Medical, Peterborough, ON*

"The problems that the crews originally had started to fade away...it's a confidence thing...people aren't feeling intimidated." - *Karel Van Hellden, Shift Engineer, Molson Brewery, Winnipeg, MB*

What can basic skills programs accomplish?

Higher Productivity - 79% of the respondents report that they have observed increased productivity in their workplaces because of their basic skills programs.

"There's more efficiency on the production line . . . 50% of this is accounted for by automation, and 50% by education... they go hand in hand." - *Doug Ellis, Purchasing Manager, Seaman's Beverages, Charlottetown, PEI*

Increased Health and Safety

82% of respondents associate increased health and safety with their workplace's basic skills program.

"People easily report dangers . . . before they wouldn't . . . they'd fear being fired." - *Don Allen, former President, United Steel Workers of America, Local 3239, Ancast, Winnipeg, MB*

"People have marked improvement in absorbing health and safety training." - *Byron Norman, former Director of the Alberta Power Employee Association, Steam Plant Operator, Alberta Power, Forestburg, AB*

Improved Labour Relations

85% of company and employee representatives concur that basic skills programs have improved labour relations in their workplaces.

"I've definitely seen this in my workplace...I'd highly recommend it to both union and company...both will gain...the temperature will go down." - *Ron Wagner, Plant Chair, Canfor Forest Products, Fort St. John, BC*

Increases in the Quality of Work

84% of the respondents report that they have observed improvements in the quality of people's work.

"People feel better about themselves so they perform better in their work and we get a better product." - *Brenda Whitman, Treasurer, Joint Workplace Training Committee, BICC/Pyrotenax, Trenton, ON*

Increased Work Effort

73% of the respondents report that they have seen an increase in work effort.

"When they see that the company spends time, they appreciate it and they become more interested in their work and try to do a better job." - *Brad McCormack, Plant Manager, Ancast, Winnipeg, MB*

More Competent Use of Technology

87% of respondents say that programs impact positively on participants' ability to use workplace-based technology.

"People can now read the computerized trouble screen." - *Martin Cheremkora, Chair, SET Committee, International Woodworkers of America, Local 1-3567, MacMillan Bloedel, New Westminster, BC*

How do I start a basic skills program in my workplace?

There are four basic steps to successfully implementing a basic skills program in your workplace. They are:

- Work with a trained professional to conduct a basic skills needs

- assessment.
- Involve all the key stakeholders in planning and setting goals for the program.
 - Develop and implement programs to meet the needs identified in the assessment.
 - Evaluate the program.

How ABC CANADA can help?

It is important that you work with qualified people right from the start. ABC CANADA, a national non-profit organization dedicated to improving literacy in Canada, can provide referrals to program providers in your area. A complete listing of non-profit providers in Canada can be found on our web site. A workplace education program is a sound investment in the current and future productivity, and success, of your business.

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