

Essential Skills

Literacy, Numeracy and
Interpersonal Skills

The following Fact Sheets are available on line at www.aofp.ca:

1. Becoming an Employer of Choice
2. Employee Turnover
3. Using the Turnover Calculator
4. Fostering Employee Commitment
5. Keeping your Good Employees
6. Employee Engagement
7. Essential Skills
8. Workforce Diversity
9. Managing a Family Business
10. Rewards
11. Recruiting Foreign Workers
12. Orientation
13. Employee Empowerment
14. Introducing Technology
15. Effective Appraisals

How can this Fact Sheet help me?

Do your employees and supervisors have the basic skills they need to be successful on the job? Research has found that on a scale of 1 to 5, 42% of Canadian adults score below 3 on writing skills and 50% score below 3 on math skills. These people will likely have difficulty meeting basic job requirements in many organizations.

This fact sheet will help you to find solutions for these employees.

Challenges and Opportunities

Essential Skills are the daily foundation skills required to perform standard job tasks, acquire new skills and adapt to workplace changes.

Employers tend not to identify a lack of essential skills as an immediate challenge to be addressed. A lack of essential skills, however, may be contributing to low productivity, poor safety records and high error rates.

Illiteracy is nearly always a hidden issue. Adults are ashamed to admit their lack of skills and will go to great lengths to avoid embarrassment. Ensure that they can seek help in confidence.

Solutions

- Assess organizational skill needs.
- Determine the skill gaps of individual employees and set essential skill targets.
- Design and schedule appropriate training.
- Track individual and organizational performance.
- Build on success.

Case Study

Pride Pak Canada Ltd. meets approximately 40% of its labour needs through Temp agencies. These workers speak as many as 19 different languages and this presents challenges: few have a basic knowledge of English and many cannot understand the process control display screen messages.

Did you know?

In 2003, the Adult Literacy and Life Skills study found that “15% of Canadians, about one out of every seven, scored in level one, the lowest performance level. This means that a large number of adults, well over three million Canadians aged 16 to 65, have problems dealing with printed materials and most likely identify themselves as people who have difficulty reading.”

References

[http://www.statcan.ca/english/freepub/81-004-XIE/2005002_Literacy numeracy and problem solving skills – Foundation skills for a knowledge based society](http://www.statcan.ca/english/freepub/81-004-XIE/2005002_Literacy_numeracy_and_problem_solving_skills_-_Foundation_skills_for_a_knowledge_based_society)

http://www.statcan.ca/Daily/English/050511/d05_0511b.htm Adult literacy and life skills survey (2003)
<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca>

<http://www.211toronto.ca/ips/index.jsp>
http://srv108.services.gc.ca/english/general/home_e.shtml

http://srv108.services.gc.ca/english/general/Understanding_ES_e.shtml

<http://measureup.towes.com/english/index.asp>

<http://www.conferenceboard.ca/education/skills/>

<http://www.afpa.com/hr/occpindex.shtml>

As an employee, how do I know if my skills measure up?

Go to www.towes.com to practice your essential skills on-line.

Essential Skills Include:

Reading
Document use
Numeracy
Writing
Oral communication
Working with others
Thinking skills
Computer use
Continuous learning

How do I start?

1. Find out what skills are needed for the jobs in your organization.

Go to www.hrdc.gc.ca/essential_skills and determine the skills needed for various occupations in your workplace.

2. Determine if lack of basic skills may be a problem in your workplace. Are there regularly occurring problems that could be error based? Do you know if people in the jobs have the skills required?

3. Encourage basic skills training. This could be done by providing in plant classes after work or advertising services and training available in your community.

For learning materials go to www.skillplan.ca. There are a number of free resources available from the “How do your Skills Measure Up?” page, and others that can be purchased, most notably “Developing Work-related Learning Materials” to help you implement your essential skills development programs.

4. Screen job applicants to ensure they have the skills to successfully do the job.

If you are interested in screening candidates or testing workers with the aim of increasing needed skills, go to www.towes.com for tests of essential skills.

ADVANTAGES OF BEST PRACTICES

- More qualified job applicants
- Better trained and informed employees
- Better health and safety practices
- More engaged and productive employees
- Fewer line interruptions
- Fewer product quality problems
- Easier implementation of new technology
- Lower absenteeism and employee turnover
- Higher sales per employee
- Higher market value to book value