

Fact Sheet 4

Challenges and solutions

Employees with low literacy and those who lack Essential Skills are less likely to participate in any training program compared to other workers. Although they may want to participate in new programs offered in the workplace, many face big challenges once they decide to improve their Workplace Literacy and Essential Skills.

What are workers' challenges?

The challenges workers face may include:

- The negative perception that remains tied to the words “literacy” and “basic skills”
- Great resistance to change
- Fear of self-identification and fear of failure
- Lack of time due to shift work, family responsibilities, volunteer commitments, etc.

What are managers' challenges?

For their part, many managers may be reluctant to offer training opportunities when doing so means they will have to replace staff or be short-staffed.

What are the solutions?

To successfully embed a positive learning culture in your organization, introduce a Workplace Literacy and Essential Skills program that builds on the following concepts and values.

Concepts that support success

- Ensure the goals of the program are clear to all. In doing so, avoid negative impressions, such as “this is a program for people who really need help with basic things like reading and writing.”
- Use titles like “workplace learning program” instead of a program title with the word “literacy” in it.
- Respect the rights of participants and their fellow employees.

“I have found this course to be a great benefit to me in performing my everyday duties. It has allowed me to develop a skill which I had found was very difficult to develop on my own.”

–Ron Collins,
Manager of Surveying,
Engineering Dept.,
City of St. John's, NL



- Ensure that the program is confidential. Do not ask for or expect progress reports on employees in the program.
- Protect the comfort levels of all participants by not asking someone to show colleagues their new skills.

Values that support success

- Focus on the value of lifelong learning, as opposed to giving employees false hopes about promotions and job security.
- Help participants feel supported rather than guilty about spending time in class and away from their paid jobs.
- Set a policy or procedure that ensures flexible class times, so that critical jobs such as snowplowing can go ahead.
- Be realistic. A person's level of productivity in an area like health and safety standards will only increase over time.
- Be aware that literacy is only one part of the puzzle. Employees need time to develop new and challenging skills, such as typing or using a computer.



This series of fact sheets is produced by the Canadian Association of Municipal Administrators. To learn more about our work in support of Workplace Literacy and Essential Skills programs, visit our website:

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