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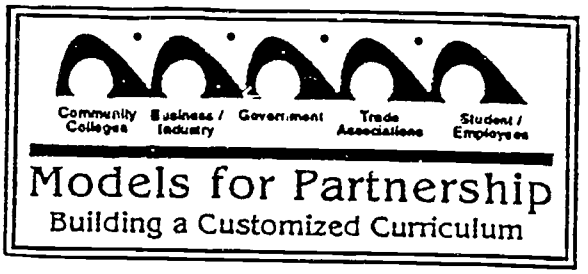
ABSTRACT

The Food Processors Skills Building project was undertaken by four Oregon community colleges, with funds from the Oregon Economic Development Department and 11 local food processing companies, to address basic skills needs in the food processing industry through the development and implementation of an industry-specific curriculum. Based on employer needs assessments, the project steering committee decided to focus on these seven curricular areas: reading, writing, mathematics, reasoning, English as a Second Language, Spanish for supervisors, and communication. Using the new curriculum, the colleges offered 26 pilot classes for their local food processing partners between November 1993 and June 1994. Outcomes of the pilot project included the following: (1) company representatives reported significant improvements in project participants' general job performance; (2) worker evaluations indicated increased confidence and movement towards personal and work-oriented goals; and (3) 9 of the 11 companies had classes scheduled beyond the project's duration or had expressed serious interest in continuing the program. Important elements in the success of the project were that the project developed a series of models for implementation; every company identified a representative to serve as a link with the steering committee, the colleges, and instructor; and the partnerships provided opportunities for continuous feedback. In addition, assistance was sought from the companies in marketing and promoting the programs, and the colleges were able to examine the long-term impact of college industry partnerships. (Includes a list project participants.) (KP)



FOOD PROCESSORS SKILLS BUILDING PROJECT

EVALUATION REPORT

Submitted to:

Northwest Food Processors Association
& Member Companies
and
Oregon Economic Development Department

by:

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Executive Summary
Food Processors Skills Building Project
Evaluation Report

December, 1994
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The Skills Building project was funded through a one-year matching grant from Oregon Economic Development Department (OEDD) and eleven food processing companies in the Willamette Valley and Columbia River areas. The grant funded a pilot year in development and implementation of a general curriculum addressing workplace education needs.

The 7 areas of focus, based on a needs assessment in each company planning to participate, were Reading, Writing, Math, Reasoning, English as a Second Language, Spanish for Supervisors, and Communication. The 4 community colleges serving these companies worked with each site to develop courses tailored to company needs (30 hours each) from the industry-specific curriculum. The seven areas were the subject of 26 pilots between November 1993 and June 1994; the resulting activities and revised curricula are now available to the public through the OEDD, Northwest Food Processors Association, and the four Oregon community college participants (Chemeketa, Columbia Gorge, Portland, and Blue Mountain).

The targeted outcomes of the pilot program, as determined by partner representatives were:

* An increase in the confidence level of each participating employee;
* An interest, by the company and/or the participant, in continuing education; and,
* Some kind of improvement in a participant's skill level and proficiency.

The population primarily targeted for the pilot classes were in one of two groups. The first group were those who had very limited or no skills in the subject area; the second group were those who had some moderate level of skill, but who needed additional development in order to move to a higher-skilled position in the company. Each company, instructor, and class of students further defined outcomes that were specific to their needs.

First Steps

The partner organizations formed a Steering Committee as a first step in developing and implementing the project. Its members met each month over a two and a half year period beginning in the fall of 1991, to provide guidance, advice and stucture to the project. Phase I produced an initial industry needs assessment, conducted in 1993, in which partner companies were surveyed to determine their most immediate concerns. Those results identified seven common areas of need: Reading, Writing, Math, Communication, Spanish for supervisors, English as a Second Language (ESL) and Reasoning. During Phase 2, a Project Coordinator and Curriculum Specialist were hired to facilitate the development and pilot-testing of an industry-specific curriculum in each of those areas.

In August, 1993, the companies and colleges met to begin creating a curriculum outline in each subject area. These outlines served as the basis for the pilot classes, in which instructors created industry and company-specific activities and worked with the students to further define and expand the curriculum. The final outlines, activities, and resources were compiled into a series of volumes and were made available to the partners for future classes.

Targeted Outcomes Achieved

The pilot programs achieved their desired outcomes, and demonstrated growth and development at a variety of levels.

* Company representatives report significant improvements in general job performance of participants as observed by supervisors. In addition, one company reported that 100% of the employees who participated in their Math pilots who attempted the company bid test successfully passed.

* Worker evaluations in every pilot class indicated high levels of increased confidence and movement towards personal and work-oriented goals. Employer evaluations concur.

* Of the eleven participating companies, nine have classes scheduled to be held in the next six months., or have indicated a serious interest in continuing to offer classes in one or more of these areas.

* A full curriculum for all six areas, including content outlines, model class formats, activities and resource materials, is also a product of this project.

What Made It Work

In addition to the anticipated outcomes, other findings emerged, including new opportunities for leadership and growth for companies and colleges

* Every pilot class and every company/college partnership looked different. As a result, the project developed a series of models of implementation rather than just one set plan of action.

* Every company identified a company leader or representative to serve as the link with the Steering Committee, the college, and the instructor.

* The representative expanded the coordination role within the company by creating an internal implementation team, often consisting of supervisors, human resource personnel, and other kinds of employee positions.

* The project management and company level implementation provided opportunities for continuous feedback and improvement throughout the development process and for all participants.

* More assistance at the company level was sought in the areas of marketing and promotion of the classes, along with broader discussions of paid vs. non-paid participation, motivation and incentive ideas and stronger internal support.

* Community colleges were able to respond to the requests for qualified and quality instructors, and began to examine the long-term impacts of continued response to the industry, and the development of a pool of experienced and high-quality workplace instructors.

A full evaluation of the project and findings, describing the structure of the project, the implementation process, specific findings and recommendations for future business/government/education partnerships is available.

This Skills Building project began three years ago in response to an industry need. The models of partnership and resulting curriculum produced serve as a framework for future development in workforce education. By creating a fresh, responsive system of collaboration, the food processing industry in the Northwest is in the forefront in efforts to address the needs of workplace literacy. The industry moves to the next phase of development, deepening the application and broadening the scope of the program.

Food Processors Skills Building Curriculum

NOW AVAILABLE

The Skills Building project was funded in part through the Oregon Economic Development Department, and as such, is available to all interested companies and educational institutions at cost. Although written for the food processing industry, it is easily adaptable to related industries as well. Companies in the Northwest may want to check with their local community college to see if they already have a copy.

All materials are provided on computer disk in Word Perfect 5.1, and may be purchased as a set or by individual subject areas. If you are interested in purchasing a copy, please contact:

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FOOD PROCESSORS SKILLS BUILDING PROJECT
EVALUATION REPORT

Introduction

The Skills Building project began over three years ago, as members of the food processing industry in Oregon were faced with a disturbing reality -- their workforce, like so many others nationwide, was not prepared for the onslaught of high technology invading their plants. Jobs that were formerly done by hand had become automated, and while it improved production tremendously, it also displaced the workers who had filled those positions. What's more, many times those employees lacked the basic skills needed to train for higher-wage, higher-skilled positions elsewhere in the company.

In a 1993 national survey, researchers found that nearly half of all adults in the United States function at the lowest literacy skill levels. As the study notes a link between literacy and success in the labor market.

> "Literacy can be thought of as currency in this society. Just as adults with little money have difficulty meeting their basic needs, those with limited literacy skills are likely to find it more challenging to pursue their goals."
>
> -- 1993 National Literacy Survey

The Skills Building project partnered business, government, and education in an attempt to address the needs of food processing workers at these literacy levels. The participating companies, in coordination with the Northwest Food Processors Association, were Agripac; Clermont, Inc.; Flavorland Foods; Lamb/Weston; NORPAC; Oregon Cherry Growers; Oregon Fruit Products; J.R. Simplot; J.M. Smuckers; Steinfeld's; and Truitt Bros. The four Oregon community college partners were Chemeketa (Salem); Columbia Gorge (The Dalles); Blue Mountain (Hermiston/Pendleton); and Portland.

Purpose and Scope of Evaluation

It was the intention of the evaluator to clarify the level of program effectiveness to the Oregon food processors, OEDD, the four community colleges and the employee participants. In addition, it was important to identify the impacts on job performance and the workplaces in general.

There were eleven food processing companies involved in the Skills Building project. Each had its own organizational culture, norms that affected the outcomes of the program, and expectations that differed dramatically in some areas. As a result, the evaluation process included sampling in all areas from all companies. Some of these data can only be compared internally; other data may reflect patterns among different companies.

Within the Steering Committee, four general outcomes or expectations emerged for this pilot program that served as the framework for this evaluation:

- An increase in the confidence level of each participating employee;
- An interest, by the company and/or the participant, in continuing education
- Some kind of improvement in a participant's skill level and proficiency; and,
- A heightened interest by participants in the class (retention rates).

Each of these outcomes required a variety of evaluation strategies, included some pre- and post-assessment, interviews, observation, and surveys of company representatives, instructors and participants.

Description of Program

Program Coordination

The Skills Building Project involved partners from business, education, and government. Many of the food processing company representatives in Oregon came to believe that their workers had fundamental skill deficiencies that were having a direct impact on the industry. The Northwest Food Processors Association (NWFPA) and 11 of its member companies,

representatives from the Oregon Economic Development Department (OEDD), and 4 community colleges -- Chemeketa, Portland, Columbia Gorge, and Blue Mountain -- formed the basis of a Steering Committee. Its members worked together over several years to identify the needs and address them. In 1993, after targeting 7 specific curricular areas, the Committee developed a grant to fund the next phase, creating a means to upgrade those skills. Eileen Casey White was hired as the Project Coordinator; she was assisted by a Management Team, whose membership included a Curriculum Specialist, Grant Manager, and representatives from OEDD, NWFPA, and Chemeketa, the lead college in the grant (Tables I-A and I-B, Project Partners). The Project Coordinator's primary task was to oversee the development of an industry-specific curriculum in seven areas: Reading, Writing, Math, English as a Second Language, Spanish for Supervisors, Communication and Reasoning.

As the lead college, Chemeketa served a number of roles in the project: Its Training & Economic Development (TED) Center housed the Project Coordinator, and provided staff support; the TED Center director, Ron Hulett, served on the Management Team; and the Training Coordinator, Jim Garaventa, served as Grant Manager in the area of funding allocation. In keeping with the collaborative partnership of this project, Dan Sempert at Portland Community College's Institute for Employee Development provided space and support for the Curriculum Specialist.

Site Coordination

Each of the four community colleges were charged with implementing pilot classes with their local food processing partners. Each community college hired a site coordinator, responsible for hiring and supervising instructors, monitoring the grant funds for their college, and developing an on-going relationship with the local industry partners. Site coordinators reported their progress through quarterly reports to the project coordinator, and received allocations from the grant based on the number of classes held at their sites.

Curriculum Development

In order to accomplish the primary objectives of creating a 7-topic area industry-specific curriculum, the Curriculum

Specialist created Technical Advisory Teams (TATs) for each topic area. These meetings were convened in August and September, 1993, with representation from all partners. Industry representatives talked about their concerns, needs, observations, and priorities; community college instructors, especially from the Adult Basic Education (ABE) departments, shared their knowledge of adult learners; representatives from OEDD provided input on the broader economic impact of an educated workforce; and the NWFPA representatives included the perspective of food processors throughout the Northwest, who have access to this curriculum upon its release.

Once the basic curriculum outlines were developed and reviewed by all partners, they were given to instructors at each community college site. In coordination with the Curriculum Specialist, the instructors developed activities to teach given objectives, determined in advance through an assessment process (see "Assessment" in a later section). The final Skills Building curriculum includes examples of activities and lesson plans from 26 classes. Within each course outline are several different ability levels, allowing the partners to target specific skills needed in a given class.

Following the completion of a class, students were provided an opportunity to evaluate the class. Those results were combined with the instructor's comments and suggestions, gathered in a series of debriefings in each topic area. Because of the distances between colleges, these debriefings were facilitated using the Oregon ED-NET system. The instructors then wrote up the class activities in a set format and turned them over to the Curriculum Specialist and Project Coordinator for final review and editing. Final word processing was done by Mary Dozark of The Secretariat at Your Service, Inc. The materials were screened for copyright violations, and all materials included were done so with the author's permission. Any copyrighted materials were cited by author, page number, and publisher if known.

A cover sheet describing the demographics, learning environment, and goals for the class, as well as a day-by-day account of the lesson plans were included to serve in part as a model for workplace basic skills education. A course description, final outline with specific outcome competencies, and background sheet for each curricular area provides colleges and companies with materials to market and target the class to a variety of needs.

Personnel/Class Information/Student Information

The first pilot class was held November 9, 1993, in The Dalles, at the Oregon Cherry Growers plant. A Supervisory Spanish class, it was offered in partnership with Columbia Gorge Community College. The last of the 26 pilot classes, Math for Food Processors, met for the final time on June 9, 1994 at the Lamb/Weston plant in Boardman. It was offered in partnership with Blue Mountain Community College. Fifteen instructors provided instruction in seven subject areas to a total of 363 employees in nine different locations, mostly on-site at food processing plants.

The average employee participant came to the program with 10 years of schooling, with a range of 16 years to no experience in the classroom at all. The average number of years with his/her company was 9.5, with a range of 6 months to 42 years. The average student was 38 years old, in a range of 20 to 63.

The participants were enrolled in pilot subject areas in a fairly even distribution pattern, with 16% in ESL and Supervisory Spanish, 20% in Math and Reasoning, 16% in Reading or Reading & Writing classes, and 11% in Communication. Of the 363 participants, 51% were female, 46% were Hispanic, and 37% were white.

TABLE I-A -- Project Partners

PARTNER	REPRESENTING	ROLE IN PROJECT
Dave Klick	Northwest Food Processors Association	Steering Committee Management Team
Ellen Nyberg	Oregon Economic Development Department	Steering Committee Management Team
Sara Dinsdale	Chemeketa Community College	Site Coordinator
Nancy Chally	Portland Community College	Site Coordinator
Bob Cole, Reine Hays-Fetz	Columbia Gorge Community College	Site Coordinators
Pat Amsberry	Blue Mountain Community College	Site Coordinator
Margaret Saylor	Blue Mountain Community College	College Representative
Eileen Casey White	Chemeketa Community College	Project Coordinator
Susan Brenner	Chemeketa Community College	Curriculum Specialist
Jim Garaventa	Chemeketa Community College	Grant Manager
Ron Hulett	Chemeketa Community College	Management Team

TABLE I-B -- Project Partners

PARTNER	REPRESENTING	ROLE IN PROJECT
Glenda Goodrich	Agripac	Steering Committee
Jim Berger; Ken Waddell; Deborah Werner	Clermont, Inc.	Steering Committee
Frank Heuschkel; Curt Williams	Flavorland Foods	Steering Committee
Brent Corson	Lamb Weston	Steering Committee
Lisa Trussell; Janie Blaylock	NORPAC	Steering Committee
Steve O'Harra; Randy Scruggs	Oregon Cherry Growers	Steering Committee
Steve Henshaw	Oregon Fruit Products	Steering Committee
Mark Fairgrieve	J.R. Simplot	Steering Committee
Ted Maldonado	J.M. Smuckers	Steering Committee
Jane Steinfeld Thomas; Karen Kuhl	Steinfeld's	Steering Committee
Lynn Peterson	Truitt Bros.	Steering Committee

Table II: Courses Offered and Number of Participants

COURSE	Number of Participants	Gender Mix	Ethnicity Mix
ESL	57	36 male, 21 female	11 Asian, 46 Hispanic
Supervisory Spanish	57	25 male, 27 female	2 Hispanic, 8 unknown, 47 White
Math	71	32 male, 39 female	45 White, 23 Hispanic, 3 Black
Reading & Writing	58	25 male, 33 female	46 Hispanic, 12 other
Communication	43	21 male, 22 female	21 White, 21 Hispanic, 1 Asian
Reasoning	77	37 male, 186 female	15 White, 31 Hispanic, 4 Black, 27 other or unknown
TOTALS:	363 participants	177 male, 186 female	136 White, 10 Black, 167 Hispanic, 17 Asian, 33 unknown

Table III: Participants by Company & College

Food Processing Company	Number of Participants	Community College Partner
Agripac	24	Chemeketa
Oregon Cherry Growers, Salem	12	Chemeketa
NORPAC	21	Chemeketa
Oregon Fruit Products	12	Chemeketa
Truitt Bros.	16	Chemeketa
J. M. Smuckers	11	Chemeketa
Oregon Cherry Growers, The Dalles	14	Columbia Gorge
Steinfeld's	55	Portland
Clermont, Inc.	3[1]	Portland
Flavorland	36	Portland
Lamb/Weston	27[2]	Blue Mountain
J.R. Simplot	129	Blue Mountain

[1]Originally committed to 15, but reduced due to workforce layoff.

[2]Originally committed to 49, but reduced to unavailability of instructor for one pilot.

OUTCOME 1

An Increase in the Confidence Level of Each Participant

Three hundred and sixty-three employees in eleven companies participated in twenty-six classes in this pilot project. Their skills were as varied as their backgrounds, with some speaking limited English, to others who simply needed to brush up on their algebra. They came for different reasons, they sought different outcomes, but all were there, in part, to increase their confidence and self-esteem. For many, this was the first time in many years that they saw themselves as "learners."

The instructors at each site also came from varied backgrounds, but all targeted, as one of their primary goals, the development and encouragement of each student's self-pride and confidence in their abilities. In addition, each curriculum outline included as its first objective a section entitled, "Learning to Learn." This objective was to be included in every class, regardless of the subject matter. It addressed such skills as:

- Understanding the way one learns (learning styles), and accommodating that to the work environment;
- Time management and materials organization;
- Learning from and with other people;
- Giving and receiving feedback appropriately; and,
- Using positive self-talk and affirmations.

These skills helped achieve the intended outcome of increasing the confidence level in each employee participating in the classes.

At the end of each pilot class, students completed a class evaluation. As part of this review, they were asked to indicate to what extent they agreed with the statement, "I feel I will do a better job at work because of this class." Ninety-nine percent of the 268 who responded stated that they either agreed or strongly agreed. Ninety percent indicated the same for the statement, "Using food processing examples in class was helpful to me."

Company representatives, members of the Steering Committee, were also asked to provide feedback on the

classes. When asked to describe examples of any notable accomplishments or changes in the participants' skills since the class, some comments included:

> *"Improved attitude; awareness of personal communication abilities; improved confidence."*
>
> *"Had demonstrated some increase in self-confidence. Would need to continue class for a longer period of time to show dramatic results."*
>
> *"Willingness to speak up and ask questions. Also, one person has bid for a better job."*

OUTCOME 2

An Interest in Continuing Education

One of the hopes of the Steering Committee was that employees who participated in classes would spark an interest in learning, and want to continue improving their skills both in that particular subject and, in a broader sense, as part of a learning organization. Hard data is not yet available, but all four community colleges have reported that some of the pilot students have enrolled in on-campus classes in a variety of subject areas since their on-site classes. In addition, nine of the eleven companies involved in the project indicated a serious interest in continuing to offer classes in one or more of the seven curricular areas, or have classes scheduled in the next six months. One company, J.R. Simplot in Hermiston, has already run several Reasoning classes post-pilot with the same instructor, Catherine Brown, and are getting ready to run some more.

In addition, company representatives indicated a high interest in continuing classes after the pilots (averaging four out of a possible five on a rating scale on a post-class survey). On the employee end-of-class evaluation, 96% either agreed or strongly agreed that they would like to take more classes in the future.

OUTCOME 3

Improvement in participant skill levels

Company representatives reported significant improvements in the general job performance of many of the participants, as part of anecdotal comments reported to the evaluator. In their post-class survey, these representatives made comments such as:

> "At least three of the seven students participating (in Supervisory Spanish classes) have handled direct and telephone conversations in Spanish, with varying degrees of success, that we would not have tackled at all in the past.
>
> "The supervisors are interacting in Spanish with the Hispanic employees and asking their help in pronouncing certain words."
>
> "We are tracking results of students who completed the class. One hundred percent of those who have taken our prerequisite Math test for bids have passed the test."
>
> "Communication has improved."

Additional reports of improvement are reflected in the students' comments about themselves in the end-of-class evaluations. Many commented on the ways in which the class has helped them do a better job at work, how they learned easier ways to do things, and ways they will be applying their newly-acquired skills in the future. Ninety-six percent of the 268 employees who responded agreed that the class, regardless of the subject area, focused on areas that were important to their jobs. Fourteen company representatives gave an average rating of 3.9 out of a possible 5 in evaluating the extent to which the class met the training need.

OUTCOME 4

Heightened Interest, Increase in Participation

The eleven companies were involved with the pilot classes at a number of levels. Some chose to send representatives to the curriculum development meetings (TATs), in order to have input into the initial course outlines, and to set the direction of the classes to be offered. Other companies placed a stronger emphasis on involvement at the plant site, and were active in providing opportunities for instructors to observe and meet with a variety of employees -- supervisors, line workers, administration, and so on. At many sites, instructors were invited to work part of a shift on a line. At a minimum, all instructors were offered a tour and time to visit with employee participants at various points during the class development process.

Each company was encouraged to identify employees within their plant to be involved in an implementation team. These groups served a variety of functions in the project, depending on the organizational expectations of the company. Some members were very active in identifying and recruiting employee participants for the classes; others provided resources for the instructor, and served as a point of reference for tapping into the needs and expectations of the workplace.

Student motivation for class participation varied at each site as well. Three companies (Steinfeld's, J.M. Smucker, and J.R. Simplot) paid their employees for their time in class; Oregon Cherry Growers at The Dalles plant also paid for the students' time, but did not pay at the Salem site; Flavorland Foods, Truitt Bros., and Lamb/Weston paid for at least one hour of each session, or some part thereof; and the other companies considered the participation to be totally voluntary. Instructors noted the differences to varying degrees, with some stating that they were not aware who was being paid or not, while others insisted that non-payment definitely affected the attendance in a negative way. Other incentives used by the companies included recognition, supervisor encouragement, and opportunities to take a bid test. Instructors provided additional motivation through certificates, visits to the plant at off-times, and other kinds of positive feedback.

In the Salem area, six companies combined their students into eight classes in order to better serve the needs of the

companies and the employees. To facilitate this, the Chemeketa site coordinator called regular planning meetings with the company representatives. This consortium proved to be very successful, and both student and company representative feedback indicated a number of benefits to this arrangement. These included opportunities to see how much food processing emplcyees at different plants have in common, a chance to take a class that might not have otherwise been offered at a site because of low enrollment numbers, and a way for companies to share the costs of a class. Negatives involved issues of transportation and less customization to the needs of a particular company.

Other Evaluation Findings

Eighty-seven percent of the instructors either visited the company and/or met with the local site coordinator prior to the start of class in order to prepare for the teaching assignment. Almost 80% gathered materials from the site and/or included materials from community college adult basic education programs. Personal interviews were the most common method of pre-assessment, and at least one other means of assessing student skills (Reading, Writing, or Math assessment, BEST test or written questionnaire) were also used. Over half of the instructors also participated in the curriculum outline process (TATs).

The current relationship with the community college was rated the highest by the representatives, with the overall change in job performance rating only a "medium" level. Most told employees about the class through personal contact or posted notices, and offered a variety of incentives including paid compensation, completion bonuses, and personal growth opportunities. Their expectations of what the students should learn depended largely on the needs of the company; some had very specific skills (math, reading, vocabulary improvement), while others were looking more for confidence, success, and positive attitudes towards learning. Ninety-nine percent of all participants were voluntary, although seniority was a factor in most plants.

Commendations

The Skills Building project, a statewide effort involving companies and colleges in a variety of sizes and locations, produced many commendable efforts. Some of the more notable ones include:

- In-kind Matches: All eleven companies contributed significant amounts of time for meetings, site visits, and general facilitation of the classes at each site. In addition, most provided space and/or materials for the students.

- Assessment: Every site coordinator and/or instructor involved in the pilots used a variety of assessment methods to monitor the progress of the students. Special attention was paid to legal issues, such as confidentiality of scores, and to the particular needs of the student. Examples of the latter include awareness of vision problems, learning disabilities, and language problems.

- Partnerships: As noted earlier, the Salem companies provided a model for other companies in the future who may need to pool their resources and their employees in order to provide classes. Other models that emerged in the project include: the combining of Flavorland Foods and Clermont, Inc. employees in Forest Grove for an ESL and a Reasoning class; the Steering Committee; the partnership among the companies and colleges in providing the classes; and the interaction of employees from different companies working together in a class (particularly in the Salem area).

- Classes/Curriculum: Of particular significance is the way the instructors and site coordinators worked with the company to uncover their specific needs and processes, and weave that into the course curriculum.

- Marketing and Promotion: The companies used a variety of marketing strategies internally to promote the classes and identify potential students. J.R. Simplot, Hermiston, used an especially successful program to promote their classes. Mark Fairgrieve and his staff presented the program to a select group of line

workers, who then went out to the rest of the plant and shared that information on an informal, one-on-one basis with many other employees. The result was that every class was full with a waiting list, and in some cases the instructors needed to offer back-to-back sessions of the same class to accommodate interested employees.

- NWFPA Strategic Plan: For the first time in many years, the NWFPA Board of Directors has included education as one of three organizational goals in their 1994-97 Strategic Plan, due in no small part to the Association's successful experiences in the Skills Building project and the efforts of NWFPA Executive Vice President Dave Klick.

- Instructor/Site Coordinator: The instructors involved with this project were key to much of the success that resulted from it. At every site, instructors were actively involved in learning about the company culture, ignited excitement about learning, and created a safe environment for learning. In addition, the four community colleges have come a long way towards developing capacity through a pool of experienced instructors in workplace education to serve the future needs of both the food processing industry and other area businesses.

Recommendations

Just as many things went right in the Skills Building project, there were also experiences that suggested other ways of doing things in the future. These "lessons learned" include:

- In-kind Matches: The process used to gather information on how companies contributed in-kind time and materials did not fully reflect all the time and effort that actually took place at the sites. The evaluator would recommend a different way of gathering and receiving that information.

- Assessment: The process colleges used to assess the initial skill levels and needs of the employee/students was based on several tools, many of which were

developed within the pilot project. Not all colleges used the same methods for the same subject areas, or even for the same class, in some cases. A clearer understanding by companies of the assessment processes used would have helped communication about the different skill levels within a specific class as it was being created. In addition, concerns about confidentiality and legality, while addressed by the project as a whole, could have been handled differently at some of the company sites. The assessment process was part of class development by the instructor, but more could have been done to bring the company representatives and implementation team into the objective selection and course planning. Finally, consistent pre- and post-measures were not obtained from all sites or in all curricular areas, making it difficult to accurately assess progress in a quantitative way.

- Partnerships: The primary collaborative site involving partnerships among several companies existed in the Salem area. Although the six companies and the Chemeketa representatives addressed a variety of issues related to providing combined classes with employees from several locations, some issues still need to be considered in future consortiums. These include child care, transportation, and agreement on specific class objectives. The Salem consortium continues to work together, in part because of Chemeketa's commitment to designating staff release time to work with the group.

- Classes/Curriculum: Additional work needed to be done with instructors in the use of the curriculum outlines as a framework or menu in the class development. In addition, recognition should be given to the value-added in having the expertise of a community college instructor.

- Marketing and Promotion: Companies have requested more assistance in developing marketing and promotion of classes at plant level. Related issues include designing recruitment strategies, increasing the class retention rate, whether employees should be paid to attend class or attend voluntarily and how to generate more internal support.

- Instructors/Site Coordinators: One of the weakest areas of this pilot project was the insufficient preparation of instructors on the use of the curriculum outlines and the design of a workplace class. Pre-service training and more ongoing curriculum development support should have been provided within the project.

Conclusion

Phase I of the Skills Building project identified seven areas of greatest need in developing a responsive workforce in the food processing industry; Phase II developed industry-specific curriculum in each of those areas and piloted 26 classes. Yet that is only the beginning for the 363 employees who participated in them. It is strongly recommended that:

1) companies continue to provide these educational opportunities for their employees, both past participants and those who were unable to be involved in the pilot classes; and,
2) additional funding be sought to track the long-term impact of the curriculum and to expand the range of skill levels within each subject area.

A single pilot class experience was not one of the goals of this project, and little long-term impact can be expected until an individual's total needs are served. Some employees may require little in the way of basic skills, perhaps a "brush-up" on math, or fundamentals in better communication as a team member. However, many others, especially those with limited English skills or who have great deficiencies in reading or math, should not be falsely encouraged by participation in just one 30-hour class.

This project began on a "grassroots" level in the Northwest food processing industry in response to a need. The subsequent partnerships with state government, local community colleges, and employees themselves produced a fresh, responsive system of collaboration at multiple levels. It is the hope of all the partners that this program continue to grow and expand, throughout the Northwest and beyond.

Food Processors Skills Building Curriculum

NOW AVAILABLE

The Skills Building project was funded in part through the Oregon Economic Development Department, and as such, is available to all interested companies and educational institutions at cost. Although written for the food processing industry, it is easily adaptable to related industries as well. Companies in the Northwest may want to check with their local community college to see if they already have a copy.

All materials are provided on computer disk in Word Perfect 5.1, and may be purchased as a set or by individual subject areas. If you are interested in purchasing a copy, please contact:

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