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Lambton
INDUSTRIAL
EDUCATIONAL
CO-OPERATIVE



**Human Resources
Development Canada**

**Développement des
ressources humaines Canada**

May 8, 2003

TO: All Soft Skills Survey Respondents

FROM: Shelley Brown

***THE PEOPLE HAVE SPOKEN AND THE RESULTS ARE IN—
SARNIA-LAMBTON'S "TOP TEN LIST"
OF SOFT SKILLS TRAINING REQUIREMENTS!***

Without *your* input, we would not have a top ten list of soft skills training requirements in our community. The Sarnia-Lambton Industrial Educational Co-operative gratefully acknowledges your contribution and participation in last fall's community-wide survey, funded in part by the Government of Canada's Labour Market Partnerships Program.

Why are soft skills increasingly important? In today's workplace with its emphasis on both technology *and* teamwork, "hard" or technical skills work hand in hand with "soft" or people skills to give organizations a competitive edge in the global marketplace.

THE TOP TEN LIST OF SOFT SKILLS TRAINING REQUIREMENTS

The top ten list would not have been possible without the participation of organizations like yours that participated in the survey. Based on the 86 surveys that were completed, the top ten soft skills training needs in our community are:

1. Team/work group participation
2. Stress management
3. Conflict management
4. Time management
5. Difficult communications
6. Listening skills
7. Decision-making and problem-solving skills
8. Team/work group leadership
9. Communicating change
10. Team/work group management

OTHER KEY FINDINGS

- A significant need for basic supervisory skills training emerged from interviews held with individual organizations – this need crosses sectors and company size

- While the overwhelmingly preference is for leader-led classroom training, there is interest in other delivery methods; i.e. computer-based training (CBT), web-based training (WBT), self-study, video-based learning, blended learning solutions, etc.
- Organizations are very concerned with training efficiency - the bulk of respondents want courses to be a half-day or less in length

THE CHALLENGE

Survey results point to the *recognition* of the importance of soft skills, and the *need* to provide training in the following areas: communication skills, personal management skills (stress & time management), teamwork skills (including conflict management), and decision-making/problem-solving skills.

Many organizations have not provided much in the way of soft skills training in recent years for a host of reasons:

- Dominance of technical training and training geared to competencies seen as more critical than soft skills (e.g. safety training)
- Outsourcing of training functions
- Difficulty freeing up staff to attend training
- Local availability of soft skills training that meets both organizational needs and preferences
- Difficulty quantifying soft skills training with bottom-line results

Recognition of the importance of soft skills and the need to train staff in various aspects of soft skills is challenged by competing demands (i.e. time, financial, and human resources) to adequately develop these skills.

BARRIERS

With respect to barriers, timing/scheduling seems to be the most often repeated obstacle. Both the length of the course (as stated previously) as well as time of year, and the day of the week are cited as potential barriers to participation in training courses. After timing constraints, cost-effectiveness is the next concern. Not only must owners and managers be convinced of the cost-effectiveness of training, but employees must also be sold on the value of training to improve their work performance.

RECOMMENDATIONS

From the findings, it is clear that research of skill development strategies, training programs, and delivery systems is a critically important next step. This should follow on the heels of the training needs analysis step to ensure expectations of community organizations can be met. Specific recommendations include:

- clarification of the definition or meaning of the soft skill(s) to ensure a common understanding of what it is and what it “looks like” when it is performed well in the workplace
- exploration of various delivery methods to meet organizational and learner preferences, as well as provide cost-effective and efficient “soft or people skills development strategies”

- some means of capturing sample employee input/data re: their perceived training needs should be conducted to ensure that both prescriptive (manager/supervisor) and felt (employee) needs are considered
- ideally, organizations should conduct some type of performance analysis by assessing current performance against desired performance – the resulting gap is what soft skills or people skills strategies are designed to close
- Barriers to transfer of training back on the job should be evaluated to minimize their impact
- Potential barriers to unionized labour involvement in soft skills training need to be recognized including who pays for training provided to workers and who pays workers to attend the training

NEXT STEPS

Now that the priority needs have been established, the IEC's next steps are to research skill development strategies, training programs, and delivery systems to meet survey respondents' preferences.

We will keep you informed of our progress and may be in touch over the next few months for your input/suggestions as we move forward.

The Industrial Educational Co-operative sincerely thanks you and your organization for participating in this important community initiative.

If you would like more detailed information pertaining to the survey, please contact:

Shelley Brown
People Skills Development Co-ordinator
Industrial Educational Co-operative
Phone: 519-383-7025 or e-mail: shelleyb@sarniasafety.com

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