

September 2002
Volume 2, Issue 9

"Excellence is an art won by training and habituation. We do not act rightly because we have virtue or excellence, but we rather have those because we have acted rightly. We are what we repeatedly do.

Excellence, then, is not an act but a habit."

- Aristotle, Philosopher

The Maine Center for Career Preparation is a private, non-profit committed to improving the economic prospects of Maine citizens.

Improving the linkages between education and workforce development is our goal.

Maine Center for Career Preparation
643D Lewiston Road
Topsham, ME 04086
207-373-0488/0479 fax
working@careerprospects.com

Education Works!

Upgrading the Basic Skills of Workers—a shared responsibility

By Tom Broussard

Teaching fundamental skills such as reading, writing and arithmetic is a highly age-appropriate activity. A first grader learns first grade things. A sophomore learns and expects to learn 10th grade things.

An adult worker learning 8th grade English is aware of their situation in a way that may negatively impact their sense of self. Consequently, teaching basic skills to adults requires a different approach designed to address issues of self-esteem which often confound the adult learning process.

This situation is further challenged as the definition of fundamental skills has changed. What was once acceptable is no longer. Written and spoken English that was once never questioned is no longer good enough. Customer service skills are now required of all workers at every level. Computer skills are a basic requirement of everyone.

It is one thing to have done poorly in school and now need remedial training. What is happening to today's workers is different. The

world has fundamentally changed and left many workers, with once acceptable skills, stranded. To make matters worse, they have been told they must upgrade their skills or lose their jobs.

Depending on what they are being asked to change, a person may feel like all they hold dear is being attacked. When asked to change the way they speak, for example, people may become defensive, regardless of how "incorrect" their speech may sound to others.

Teachers in traditional education are granted "permission" to hold high expectations of their students. In the modern world, supervisors and managers have assumed the role of teacher. As such, they must now earn "permission" to hold high expectations of their workers. Mastering that skill is at the center of success as a supervisor or team leader in today's world.

Adult learners can learn new things. They do it all the time. However, when adults learn new things it is typically because they want to. Understanding *why* certain information is important to learn helps adults make the choice to want to learn.

Without first understanding *why* something is important to learn, learning the basics—learning anything—can be a frustrating and less than successful experience. Today, workplace training must address both *what* and *why*.

