

"If a man empties his purse into his head, no one can take it away from him. An investment of knowledge always pays the best interest."

Benjamin Franklin

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.

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Education Works!

Working Mainers & Globalization

By Tom Broussard

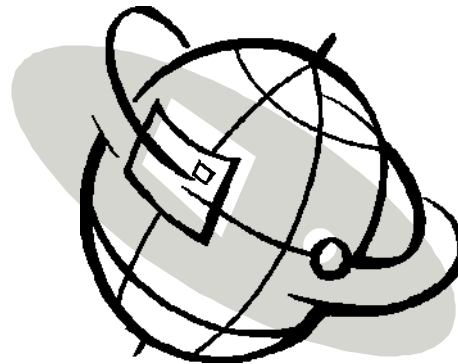
Hearing more and more about the term "workforce development" lately? It's been around for awhile under different names. Most recently, the Job Training Partnership Act was the legislation that provided workforce development funding to states. In 1998, the Workforce Investment Act completely redefined that legislation and the way Maine delivers services.

Workforce development services were originally remedial in nature. Training and employment services were provided to those who had lost their job or were re-entering the workforce with outdated skills. The system was designed to assist those people characterized as most in need.

Of course, all that has changed. In today's world, we are ALL in need. *Some of us just don't know it yet.*

Tight Labor Market

Competition for workers is, shall we say, fierce. We have looked everywhere for additional new workers. Labor force participation rate increases for women in the last twenty years have driven the overall participation rate—the rate at which all working-age people in Maine are working—to over 70%. Four years of welfare reform in



Maine has reduced the welfare caseload from 23,000 to under 10,000. Most of those people have gone back to work. We have tried everything and still it is reported that on any given day, we have thousands of good jobs unfilled here in Maine. Yet we have many people out of work at the same time. How can this be?

Job destruction & employment clear cutting

Maine has approximately 690,000 workers. Because of the speed with which the new economy is evolving, it is estimated that anywhere between

5% to 15% of existing jobs disappear every year. At that rate, between 30,000 and 90,000 Maine citizens lose their job every year to *job destruction*. Like losing species in a primeval rain forest, these aren't jobs that are going unfilled. *These are jobs that are going extinct.*

The conversion of work to a service economy

For all the job losses, Maine has still experienced a positive job growth. But the new jobs—the new species of jobs, if you will—have been largely lower paid service sector jobs. The new jobs typically require skills that the recently displaced workers often do not have. As a result, while there is a net addition of jobs to the economy, many of the workers who most recently lost their jobs are not qualified to take the new ones.

Skills and education have a shelf life

The definition of workforce development has changed significantly in response to these phenomena. What was once a service provided only to the unemployed has been changed to provide universal access to all Maine citizens. Why? For one thing, fewer people are unemployed. At last count in Maine approximately 4.3% or 29,600 people were unemployed.

It makes no sense to build a service delivery system

that is underutilized by virtue of the fact that so many people are working. Neither does it make sense to limit services to the relatively few currently unemployed when so many more citizens are likely to become unemployed through the destruction of “old growth” job species.

The new Career Centers in Maine are working to provide employment and career development to all Maine citizens. But more than that, the Career Centers aspire to develop among Mainers a keener understanding of the learning continuum that begins with K-12 education and never, never ends.

We can no longer wait to be displaced before preparing for our next job. Once displaced, it is too late to begin the process of updating those skills that are at risk of extinction. Today, all skills are at risk of extinction. Today, skills and education have a shelf life.

Invest in People



Upgrading the skills of incumbent workers isn't an act of altruism. It's a necessity. The reality is that Maine needs all its

workers to be trained (over and over again) and working at top capacity for everyone's good. We don't have enough workers. We are never going to have enough workers. All we can do is invest in the human capital that we do have.



Whether through clear cutting or selective harvesting, “old growth” species of jobs—shoes, textiles, and paper—are all in steep decline. Nothing can stop it.

The good news is that while old jobs are disappearing, new jobs are growing to take their place.

The catch is that the new jobs are not always in the same place as the old ones being lost. Nor are the required skills the same.

While it might take decades, a clear-cut forest will eventually regenerate itself. Rebuilding a workforce which is experiencing this employment “clear-cut” brought on by globalization can take even longer. Workers will continue to be buffeted by the winds of globalization. This is a storm with no end.

And while there is no safe haven in this storm, education can provide some shelter. Perpetual learning defines life in the 21st century.

Today, skills and education have a shelf life.