

WORK ABILITY

Literacy and Essential Skills
in the Workplace



“The ability of firms to compete will increasingly depend on the basic skills of the average worker.”

Addressing Canada's Literacy Challenge, Data Angel Policy Research Inc., 2009



PEI
Literacy
Alliance

The catalyst for the PEI Literacy Alliance to reach out to business and industry in Prince Edward Island is the growing need to enhance the skills of all Islanders as we face national and global competition. The key to succeeding on the world stage is essential skills development to compete in a knowledge-based economy.

Literacy skill levels of the adult population are directly linked to the present and future economic well being of the province. Essential skills, including literacy, are recognized as being the key to the success of modern business as new jobs require higher skill levels and current jobs have changing skill requirements.

Just last fall, the Keenan family, owners of Rollo Bay Holdings in Souris, was recognized as literacy and essential skills champions for their commitment to offer learning programs for their employees. We encourage more employers to take advantage of the many supports that are available to them to become learning champions for their employees. Learning at work is a win-win situation for employees, employers, their families, and the economy, in general.

I commend the PEI Literacy Alliance for its initiative in helping Prince Edward Island businesses position themselves to face the challenges of the new economy by having a well trained workforce, with strong essential skills demanded by the world's markets.



Allen G. Roach

Allen G. Roach, *Minister*
Innovation and Advanced Learning



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Safety at Work A gain for all

82% of respondents reported **increased health and safety** after completing their workplace’s basic skills program.

The Economic Benefits of Improving Literacy Skills in the Workplace, Conf. Board of Can., 2007

“The understanding of safety regulations and procedures leads to **fewer injuries**, which in turn leads to **reduced insurance costs** and **less employee downtime.**”

ABC Life Literacy Canada

What You Don’t Know Can Hurt You: Health and Safety at Work

Many employers rely on written materials to communicate health and safety procedures to their employees. This is risky since some employees may struggle with reading and misunderstand instructions or health warnings.

Workplace accidents and injuries can create high costs and serious consequences for businesses, workers, and their families. In many ways, health and safety is a bottom-line business issue.

Literacy skills may also effect your businesses ability to meet regulatory responsibilities, for example reading and comprehension of WHMIS materials and directions can require a high level of literacy.

Many employers are not aware of the literacy skills issues in their workforce. According to the *International Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey (2003)*, half of all employees in PEI have low literacy skills. That means that it is likely that most workplaces in PEI have some literacy or essential skills deficits.

Essential Skills training for employees may be the solution for many workplaces dealing with higher than average rates of accidents and injuries.

Some employers object to providing training for employees because they believe it will:

- cause scheduling conflicts
- create more work for others
- leave work areas short staffed
- cost too much

However, the benefits of Essential Skills training at work often outweighs the costs and inconveniences of providing training.

Benefits include:

- **Safer workplaces** - When workers with low literacy skills are assisted in raising their skills, they are better able to act and react to workplace situations.

Safe workplaces operate more smoothly and have lower potential for mistakes, accidents and injuries.

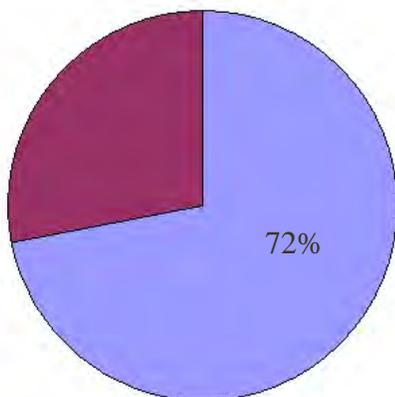
Also, workers with improved skills can better understand their right to refuse work that is potentially unsafe.

- **Increased productivity and competitiveness** - A better skilled workforce leads to less absenteeism and employees show more initiative, motivation and stay longer in their jobs.

They are also better able to adapt to change and are more prepared to take on new responsibilities. They can understand instructions better and use advancing technologies with more ease.

- **Better communication and teamwork** - Employees with increase essential skills have more confidence and are more willing to work cooperatively on new initiatives.

To learn how you can offer Essential Skills training in your workplace, contact the PEI Literacy Alliance at 368-3620 or email info@peiliteracy.ca



Did you know that 72% of Canadians that scored below the desired literacy levels are employed?

(International Adult Literacy Skills Survey [IALSS], 2003)

A Culture of Learning at the Delta

Rhonda Maillet is the Director of People Resources at the Delta Hotel in Charlottetown. She spoke at the PEI Literacy Alliance Annual Meeting in 2012, and we caught up with her again at the Delta. Here is our discussion:

“Some of our older workers are working hard to get comfortable with the technology. Much of our communication is on computers now, everything from applying for a job to memos and newsletters.”

Rhonda Maillet, Delta Hotel

Q: When you spoke at our annual meeting you mentioned that a trend you see is that some older employees are not comfortable with computers, while younger ones are not so good at oral communication skills. Is this still the case?

A: Some of our older workers are working hard to get comfortable with the technology. Much of our communication is on computers now, everything from applying for a job to memos and newsletters. If someone doesn't check their e-mail frequently we get a red flag and find out why. The younger workers are so technology driven. This is good because they adapt easily to our system.

Q: Does the Delta provide any training to address these problems? Do you provide any other training?

A: Our training for technology is on a case-by-case basis. Our Executive Housekeeper and some colleagues mentor the new ones who may be missing some skills. We offer customer service training to all our employees. All our employees are trained to greet our clients with a smile when they are within 10 feet of them, and say hello when they are within 5 feet. The hospitality industry is all about customer service.

We also want all our employees to be problem solvers. If they hear a complaint and can't address the



Rhonda Maillet, Delta Hotel

issue themselves, they alert someone who can. This calls for problem solving and decision making skills.

All our employees need to use the computer system, and to learn the Delta way of doing things. Even our Delta employee reward program for jobs well done is on an electronic platform.

Q: Do you have any outstanding success stories?

A: We have an older gentleman working here who is very dedicated and everybody likes him, but I know he has some literacy issues. We take the time to help him when he gets stuck on a computer procedure.

Q: What are some of the skills of a great employee?

A: The two big requirements are a positive attitude and a willingness to learn. Everything else follows, like communication skills. Several of our employees don't speak English well, but they can communicate nonverbally very well.

Q: The hotel is undergoing some big changes. Will you require more staff?

A: We will be hiring people in culinary for the kitchen. The culinary staff need some technical skills. We will also need more employees in the banquet area. We like them to have serving experience, but a positive attitude is worth so much more.

This is a very exciting time for the hotel. We can't wait for the opening of our new conference area, lobby and restaurant.

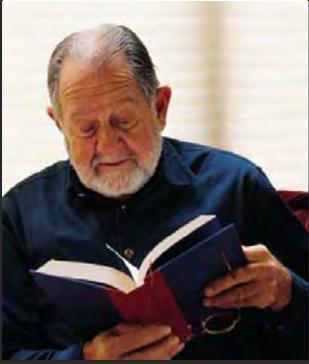
“Enhanced literacy skills prepare employees for managerial and technological changes in the workplace and position the company for greater competitiveness”

Workplace Literacy Facts, ABC
Life Literacy Canada



New convention centre attached to the Delta Hotel in Charlottetown

Myths and Facts about Workplace Literacy and Essential Skills

Myths	Facts	
<p>Literacy is the simple ability to read and write</p> 	<p>FACT: The Government of Canada recognizes nine Essential Skills that are used in daily life and in almost every job:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Reading 2. Document Use 3. Numeracy 4. Writing 5. Oral Communication 6. Working With Others 7. Continuous Learning 8. Thinking Skills 9. Computer Use 	
<p>If workers have low literacy skills, it is their own fault</p>	<p>FACT: There are many reasons why people do not learn to read and write well. Poverty, special learning needs, geographic location, access to education programs and family demands can all have an impact on how well someone learns.</p>	
<p>Hiring employees with Grade 12 ensures they will have a good base in literacy and Essential Skills</p>	<p>FACT: The most common place that people practice and improve their literacy skills is at work.</p> <p>FACT: When people in the workplace do not regularly read or write at work, they may find that their skills get weaker or are lost.</p>	
<p>Training is unlikely to contribute to “hard” business benefits</p>	<p>FACT: In a recent study by the Conference Board of Canada, 82% of employers surveyed said that increased health and safety was linked to an Essential Skills program in their workplace.</p>	

Minigoo Fisheries - A Success Story

Minigoo Fisheries is owned and operated by the Lennox Island First Nation. The workforce includes aboriginal and non aboriginal workers from nearby communities working side by side on the production line. Minigoo Fisheries follows many of the values of the Mi'kmaq culture - creating sustainable work and protecting a valuable natural resource from the sea.

It is no secret that Minigoo Fisheries went through a rough patch, but like many other companies that have experienced tough times, Minigoo Fisheries got back on its feet and tried for success again - this time getting it right.

In the summer of 2012, 40 employees took part in a three-week comprehensive training program put on by Workplace Learning PEI. Prior to the start of the intensive Essential Skills training, each participant was assessed in order to plan an effective training program that would meet the needs of the participants. Based on the results of the assessments, the training focused on

“The training was about the individual as a whole and not just as an employee.”

Chief Darlene Bernard
Lennox Island Band

team building, communication skills, working with others, and document use. "I loved the training, it was exciting to see what they will come up with each day for activities" participant Stewart Lewis said when asked what he thought of the training.

The training was made possible by a strong partnership and collaboration between Lennox Island First Nation, Workplace Learning PEI, Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, and Skills PEI.

"The training was about the individual as a whole and not just as an employee. The whole training experience really helped community members understand what Minigoo Fisheries is all about – it is all about providing for individuals and their families." says Chief Darlene Bernard.

The training gave the staff the confidence and teambuilding knowledge needed to make Minigoo Fisheries a thriving and competitive plant. "Productivity has increased substantially" says Don Bernard, General Manager.

Minigoo Fisheries is a success story for many reasons. They looked at their employees as whole individuals and not just as plant workers. For that reason, they now have a happy and productive workforce. They have created work in a community where few opportunities exist - in fact they plan to hire 120 people next season. Ultimately, in the face of failure, they did not give up, but instead developed a new plan of action that really paid off.



All employees actively took part in the 3-week workplace essential skills training

Who's Who in PEI's Essential Skills

Workplace Learning PEI

To work productively in today's economy, employees must have high levels of technical skills as well as Essential Skills. Effective work-related learning programs can help.

Workplace Learning PEI has developed a unique approach to skills enhancement that strengthens people's confidence in their ability and inspires them to take action.

Telephone: 902 368 6280

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Web: www.workplacelearningpei.com



The Workplace Learning PEI team



PEI Trucking Sector Council

Brian Oulton is Executive Director of the PEI Trucking Sector Council. Brian and the Sector Council have made great strides in improving the essential skill levels of workers in the industry.

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There are over 350 Essential Skills Profiles which describe how workers in various occupations use each of the essential skills. To view these profiles, Google "Essential Skills Profiles"

Department of Innovation and Advanced Learning Apprenticeship Training

Susan LeFort is the Manager of Apprenticeship for PEI. Apprenticeship combines on-the-job training under the supervision of a qualified tradesperson and classroom training at a training establishment. Having strong Essential Skills can help apprentices succeed in their training and in the workplace.

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PEI Literacy Alliance's WORKABILITY Campaign

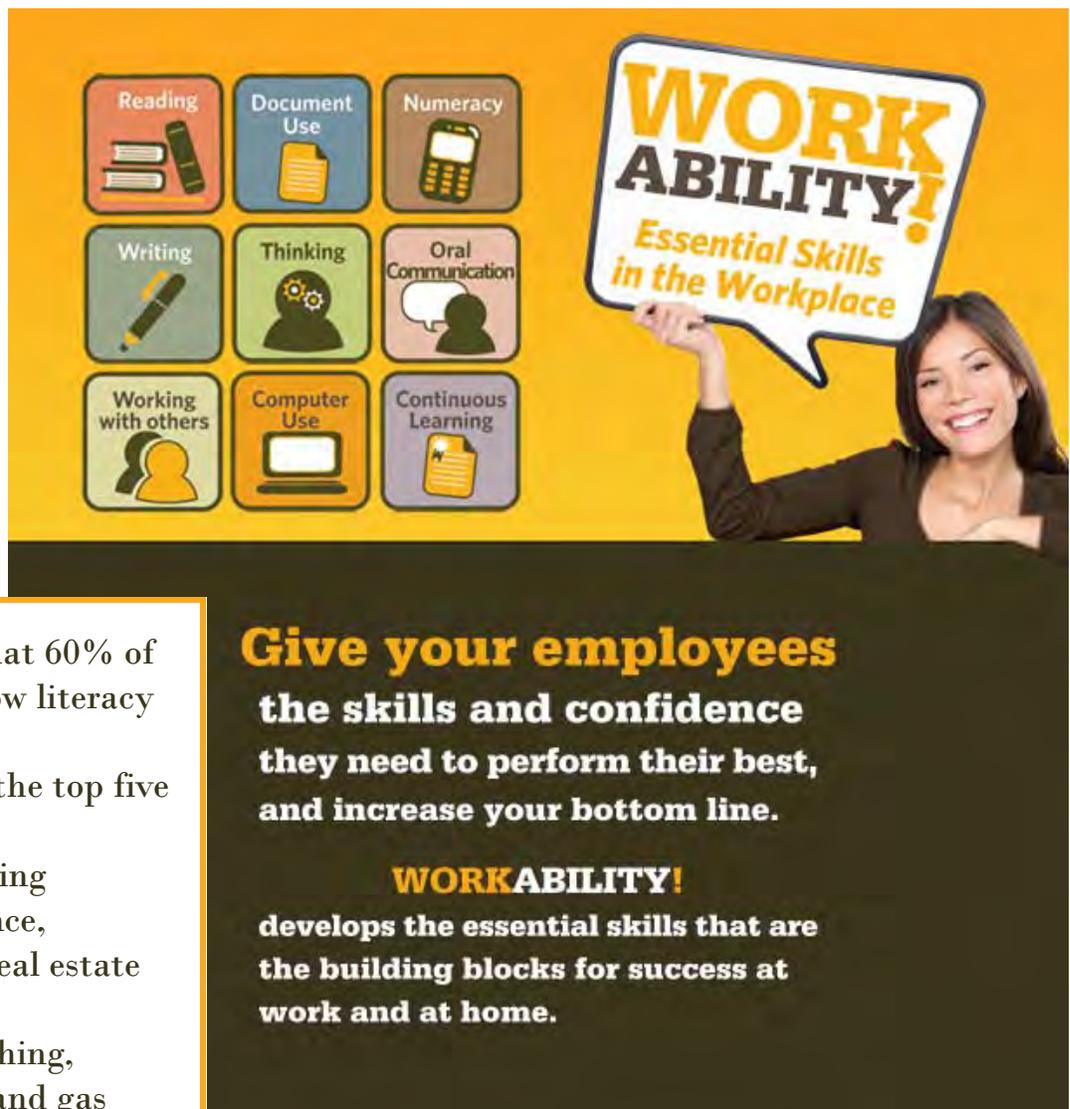


Catherine O'Bryan is the executive director of the PEI Literacy Alliance. The Alliance is committed to helping employers understand Literacy and Essential Skills and the benefits involved in supporting employees to reach their potential.

Phone: 902-368-3620

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The graphic features a woman holding a large speech bubble that says "WORKABILITY! Essential Skills in the Workplace". To the left of the speech bubble is a grid of nine icons representing essential skills: Reading (books), Document Use (document), Numeracy (calculator), Writing (pen), Thinking (gears), Oral Communication (speech bubble), Working with others (two people), Computer Use (laptop), and Continuous Learning (lightbulb).

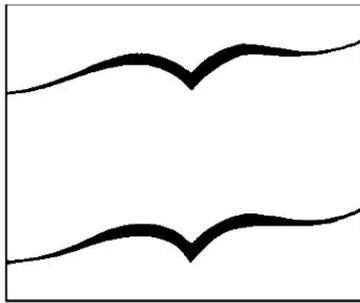
Give your employees the skills and confidence they need to perform their best, and increase your bottom line.

WORKABILITY!
develops the essential skills that are the building blocks for success at work and at home.

Did you know that 60% of Islanders with low literacy performance are concentrated in the top five sectors:

1. Manufacturing
2. Trade, finance, insurance, real estate and leasing
3. Forestry, fishing, mining, oil and gas
4. Agriculture
5. Construction

(International Adult Literacy Skills Survey [IALSS], 2003)



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