



The Conference Board
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CASE STUDY 28

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Employability Skills
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Contact
Adele Thomson
Associate Dean
Keyano College
Mackenzie Campus
8115 Franklin Avenue
Fort McMurray, AB
T9H 2H7
Tel: (780) 799-8604
Fax: (780) 791-1579
thomson@keyanoc.ab.ca

Name of Program
Keyano College's Mine
Operations Program

Developing mine operators' employability skills for individual
and corporate success

KEYANO COLLEGE'S MINE OPERATIONS PROGRAM

*Helping the next generation of mine operators
to contribute in a broader way and
prepare themselves for progression in
their respective companies*

BY KURTIS KITAGAWA

August 1999

Keyano College has partnered with Suncor Energy and Syncrude Canada Ltd. to develop a new *Mine Operations Program* with substantial emphasis on enhancing students' employability skills to prepare the next generation of mine operators whom the oilsands industry will be hiring. Suncor, for example, will be hiring hundreds of mine operators to complete its Project Millennium to double the company's current production of oil from oil sands by the year 2002.

Overview

Keyano College is located in Fort McMurray, Alberta, home of the world's largest deposits of oil sands. The College has a long history of partnering with Suncor and Syncrude, the world's leading producers of oil from oil sands. For example, in 1988, Keyano, in partnership with Syncrude, developed and

launched *ERIC* (Effective Reading in Context), Canada's first workplace literacy program. The award-winning program enhances the reading comprehension and numeracy skills of all Syncrude employees and employees at other companies, improving employers' bottom-line performance and giving employees a better chance for success.¹

In 1993, Keyano and Syncrude partnered again in a program that received an award in the Conference Board's national awards program in 1997. This program trained students as crawler tractor, backhoe, motor grader and front and rear end loader operators to meet the region's need for skilled heavy equipment operators and provide students with broad based on-the-job training to help them make their school-to-work transitions.²

Now, building on its 30 year reputation for training heavy equipment operators to industry standards, Keyano is partnering with the oilsands industry to develop a new 28 week *Mine Operations*

¹ See Case Study 17 in this series.

² See the Conference Board of Canada's *100 Best Business-Education Partnerships 1997 IdeaBook*, p. 54.

National Business and Education Centre (NBEC)

Director: MaryAnn McLaughlin

Principal Research Associate: Michael Bloom

Research Associates: Kurtis Kitagawa
Douglas Watt

Awards Program Manager: Linda Scott

Administrator and Conference Manager: Jean Smith

Program Assistant (Awards): Alison Campbell

Program Assistant (NBEC): Amy Adams

NBEC Mission

We help business and education leaders work collaboratively to promote the development of a learning society that will prepare Canada's young people for a changing world.

Program, with at least 6 weeks devoted to developing employability skills. Keyano is designing this program, consistent with its mission statement to “provide excellent education, training and services that will prepare people for the challenges of work and enhance individual growth”, to meet the oilsands industry’s need for a new generation of mine operators, who are expected to contribute in a broader way and prepare themselves for progression in the company.

Activities

Challenges

In the past, oilsands companies hired mine operators on the basis of having at least a Grade 12 education or GED and had their existing drivers mentor them in their trucks. Mine operators typically worked alone on shifts in their trucks and were not called upon to exercise their analytical skills or to work in teams. These circumstances had an unfortunate consequence. Mine operators who became eligible for progression found that they did not always have the generic skills they needed to make successful transitions.

Moreover, as everyone in the oilsands industry is committed to making employment opportunities available to everyone in the area who is prepared for the work they offer, the company invites women to work in non-traditional roles and encourages aboriginal people to apply. The latter may face special challenges — common to anybody who moves from a small to a larger community — connected with living and working in a new environment, with different expectations, learning new things and being isolated and cut off from the support of their extended families.

Response

The oilsands industry has taken steps to address these challenges and to pre-

pare the next generation of mine operators to get, keep and progress in their jobs. For example, to address the particular challenges summer students face, Suncor provided a one-week orientation program to build up friendships among students and address health and safety issues. Students also received some preliminary driving training in a gravel pit, where nothing can go wrong, from a Keyano instructor. Students learned in a safe, non-threatening environment how to back up and load trucks and how to use mirrors and radios.

To address the challenges faced by new mine operators, Suncor has donated 500K over 5 years to Keyano to assist in the development of a curriculum that will develop potential employees by:

- Enhancing their academic, personal management and teamwork skills
- Introducing oilsands terminology and improving communications skills
- Enhancing their capacity for lifelong learning so they can take advantage of further technical training and opportunities for upward mobility within the company as and when they arise
- Encouraging positive attitude, confidence, honesty, integrity and personal ethics
- Promoting the virtues of adaptability and having a positive attitude towards change
- Preparing them with the knowledge and habits that contribute to wellness in a shiftwork environment, including nutrition; healthy lifestyle; stress and sleep management; involving family and safety and alertness at work³
- Encouraging the values of showing initiative, being organized, responsible and accountable and setting personal goals
- Focusing on working with others, cultural awareness, respect for diversity and fair treatment of employees

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³ It is clear from *Shifting to Wellness*, Keyano's Healthy Shiftwork Lifestyle Initiative, which is an important part of the new *Mine*

Operator Program, just how deeply employability skills are embedded in training the next generation of mine operators.

The Employability Skills Forum Mission

We are committed to improving the productivity and quality of life for individuals, organizations and society by enhancing the employability skills of the current and future workforce of Canada.

This study was made possible through funding by members of the Employability Skills Forum.

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Forum Manager: Kurtis Kitagawa

The oilsands industry's strategy for enhancing potential mine operators' employability skills through the *Mine Operations Program* at Keyano is transparently reflected in the values articulated in a recent speech by Sue Lee, Senior Vice President, Human Resources and Communications, Suncor Energy. Ms. Lee quoted from Suncor's values and beliefs statement, created with input from Suncor employees: "The ideal workplace is ... a place where each employee has the opportunity to grow and accomplish".

Accordingly, Suncor and its employees have committed to:

- Treating each other and their customers fairly and with respect
- Encouraging ... open, honest communication
- Valuing the judgement of employees by giving them the latitude to make decisions, take calculated risks, learn from mistakes and put ideas to work⁴

Everyone in the oilsands industry recognizes the importance of developing employability skills to the success of its major expansion bid in the oilsands and is following through by preparing potential employees for personal and workplace success.

It is clear from *Shifting to Wellness*, Keyano's Healthy Shiftwork Lifestyle Initiative, which is an important part of the new *Mine Operations Program*, just how deeply employability skills are embedded in training the next generation of mine operators.

Groups Served

- Potential Mine Operators
- Oilsands Industry As a Whole
- Local Community

Objectives

- ✓ Enhance potential mine operators' employability skills

- ✓ Equip all oilsands industry employees with the skills they need for individual career growth and corporate success

Resources required

- ✓ 100K per year from Keyano
- ✓ Suncor has invested 500K over 5 years
- ✓ Syncrude and Shell are also involved

Benefits

Potential Mine Operators

- ✓ Enhance their employability skills
- ✓ Take charge of their own career development
- ✓ Have healthier lifestyle
- ✓ Form friendships that build cohesiveness among employees who work alone

Families

- ✓ Improve quality of life

Oilsands industry

- ✓ Screens potential mine operators
- ✓ Assesses long term potential of potential employees
- ✓ Develops safer, more productive employees

Community

- ✓ Strengthens its economic and social base

Innovation

The oilsands industry's innovation lies in taking a long term approach to employee recruitment and investing in training. Potential employees learn employability skills that will help them not only get but keep and progress in their jobs. The oilsands industry and individual oilsands companies gain from developing an upwardly mobile, safer, more productive workforce. The oilsands industry's investment also strengthens

⁴ Sue Lee, "How human resources, communications help drive corporate growth," in *Canadian Speeches: Issues of the day*, Vol. 12, Issue 9 (January/February, 1999), pp. 66, 67.

The Conference Board of Canada

255 Smyth Road
Ottawa, Ontario K1H 8M7
Canada
Tel: (613) 526-3280
Fax: (613) 526-4857
Internet:
<http://www.conferenceboard.ca>

The Conference Board, Inc.

845 Third Avenue
New York, N.Y. 10022 U.S.A.
Tel: (212) 759-0900
Fax: (212) 980-7014
Internet:
<http://www.conference-board.org>

The Conference Board Europe

Chaussée de La Hulpe 130, bte 11
B-1000 Brussels, Belgium
Tel: (32) 2.675 54 05
Fax: (32) 2.675 03 95

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*Sandra Kendel
Robert Loader
Doug MacRae
Adele Thomson*

the economic and social base of the local community in Fort McMurray because strong employability skills contribute to success at home and school as well as in the world of work.

Case study to be revisited and completed once Keyano's new *Mine Operations Program* is running after mid-October.

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NBEC Publications Relating to Employability Skills Development and Assessment

Employability Skills Profile

Science Literacy for the World of Work

Understanding Employability Skills (Apr. 99)

The Economic Benefits of Improving Literacy in the Workplace, 206-97 Report.

Enhancing Employability Skills: Innovative Partnerships, Projects and Programs, 118-94 Report.

Linking Teachers, Science, Technology and Research: Business and Education Collaborations That Work, 144-95 Report.

1998 100-Best Partnerships IdeaBook

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