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Name of Program
*Make the Skills
Connection*

Skills Developed
*Fundamental
Personal Management
Teamwork*

Effective practices in developing and supporting transitions for individuals who are outside the publicly funded education system

MAKE THE SKILLS CONNECTION

*Building individuals' self-confidence as a first
step to helping them acquire or enhance their
employability and essential skills or ensure the
success of their job-specific training*

BY KURTIS KITAGAWA

January 2001

All over the world, organizations and countries are facing the challenges of competitiveness and growth in the knowledge economy. This imperative has driven the rapid pace of technological change in Canadian workplaces. Change, in turn, has created a demand for people who are equipped with the skills they need to enter the world of work, keep their jobs and make progress in employment. The federal and provincial levels of government share responsibility for delivering career and labour market information and providing skills training. This case study points to some gaps in relation to equipping Canadians with the skills they need. It recommends a comprehensive practical strategy to develop and support transitions for individuals who are outside the publicly funded education system. The strategy focuses on developing generic employability skills at every stage in the process of making labour market transitions—from a client's initial approach for information, through the counsellor's assessment of their needs, to job/training placement and beyond.

Background

In the summer of 1999, The Conference Board of Canada and Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC) entered into a strategic alliance. They joined forces to co-operate in the area of communicating skills information and to strengthen the linkages between the Board's long-standing action research in the area of employability skills and HRDC's well established Essential Skills Research Project and Career Information expertise.

The overarching goal of this partnership is to identify best practices of how Canadians make successful labour market transitions. Examples include:

- Understanding the counsellor/client relationship as a key element for success
- Showcasing collaborative work-ready practices
- Promoting job-search processes that clients can manage themselves and replicate down the road, and

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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.

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- Taking a holistic view of skill development and transferability

HRDC's collaboration with the Conference Board was first reported in the second issue of *Making the Connections: The Employability Skills Forum Newsletter* in October 1999. HRDC and the Board are communicating the results of their collaboration in a publication series under the general title *Make the Skills Connection*.

Two publications in this series have already appeared. The first publication, *Make the Skills Connection: Your Gateway to the Resources*, shows the connection between HRDC's Essential Skills and the Conference Board's Employability Skills, which is a first step in helping to guide Canadians to the many resources available to support their skills assessment and development activities.

The second publication, *Resource Guide: Products That Teachers and Trainers Can Use*, directs teachers and trainers to products they will find helpful as they develop skills in adults and young learners. This document gives examples of some of the most widely used skills development products available in Canada's provinces and territories.

Other publications in the *Make the Skills Connection* series are planned, including *Your Skills Profiler: Three easy steps to identifying your skills, attitudes and behaviours . . . and marketing yourself!*, which will help Canadians:

1. Identify their skills;
2. Put their skills together to create profiles for themselves; and
3. Match their skills to their situation.

- ✓ The most recent initiative undertaken by the Conference Board in collaboration with HRDC involved in-depth interviews with dozens of community based-trainers and counsellors from all across Canada. These are the people who help Canadians who are outside of the publicly funded education system make transitions into the labour force. This case study focuses

on this initiative. Recommendations for enlarging the HRDC/Conference Board partnership appear in the final section of this study.

Groups Served

- ✓ Canadians who are outside the publicly funded education system (including long-term unemployed, Employment Insurance (EI) recipients, new Canadians, Aboriginal youth, adults displaced from employment at mid-career, at-risk youth, abused women, etc.)
- ✓ community-based trainers and counsellors
- ✓ governments
- ✓ employers

Objectives

- ✓ To better understand the front-line needs of community-based trainers and counsellors as they work with their clients to help make them ready for employment
- ✓ To better understand where different target groups are starting from in relation to their awareness of the importance of employability/essential skills and how they are used at home, school, work and in the community and their own sense of the things they do or can do and the skills they have
- ✓ to provide community-based trainers and counsellors with a "toolkit" of proven practical exercises they can use with their clients to build their self-confidence and raise their awareness of the skills they have and the ways in which those skills are used in the world of work. This will help them to become more job-ready and ease their transition into the labour market.

Activities

From August to December 2000, the Conference Board, in collaboration with HRDC, conducted in-depth interviews with dozens of these community-based trainers and counsellors from all across Canada who help Canadians who are outside of the publicly funded education

system make transitions into the labour force. In their interviews, the trainers and counsellors were asked to respond to a number of questions, including the:

- ✓ types of clients they serve;
- ✓ specific challenges their clients face (low self-confidence, negative thinking, lack of work experience, low levels of literacy and numeracy, underdeveloped social skills, risk aversion, trust issues, etc.);
- ✓ challenges trainers face in serving their clients (e.g., providing counselling to boost their clients' self-esteem, accessing literacy programs, providing "soft skills" training, linking up with employers, etc.);
- ✓ strategies trainers employ and the activities and tools they use to address their clients' needs (e.g., "day in the life" exercises in which the connection is made between the activities clients engage in and the skills they thereby demonstrate, etc.); and
- ✓ outcomes trainers realistically and ideally hope to achieve for their clients (e.g., ready to make informed training decisions, etc.).

The Career Counselling Process for Clients

The community-based trainers and counsellors we interviewed are all in the business of assessing and meeting the needs, in relation to skills and employment, of the diverse clients who come to their organizations looking for assistance. Their role is largely to help their clients regain control of their present situation and circumstances by:

- ✓ facilitating their clients' taking *action* to address their own challenges regarding skills and employment
- ✓ helping their clients to reframe their *thoughts* with a view to breaking down patterns of negativity and building more positive attitudes.

Understanding Client Realities

Trainers and counsellors tend to take a holistic—as opposed to a piecemeal—

approach to their clients. In other words, they relate their clients' grasp of skills information and their state of job readiness to their life situation and skills.

Counsellors must consider their clients as the bearers of potentially employable skills. Their clients are people, first and foremost—people whose potential can be released only when their self-confidence is raised and a relationship of trust established. Clients' needs are quite varied and relate not only to their skills and education levels but also to their employment histories and how well they are able to negotiate transactions in the labour market.

Skills- and education-related information from clients

The particular problems clients may face

- ✓ Having outdated work experience/ education/occupational skills (e.g., being unfamiliar with new technologies)
- ✓ Lacking specific qualifications/ training in particular skill areas
- ✓ Lacking generic skills
- ✓ Having work experience but lacking formal education (e.g., high school diploma)
- ✓ Not having their educational credentials/qualifications recognized—mismatch between education obtained outside the country and Canadian labour market needs
- ✓ Not knowing a significant adult who is employed and therefore having difficulty imagining a worker and a worker's role
- ✓ Lacking information about employers' requirements
- ✓ Having expectations of the labour market that are incompatible with labour market realities
- ✓ Lacking work experience and consequently feeling that they are not skilled enough to do a given job—a self-confidence issue
- ✓ Not being aware of their potential

- ✓ Missing skills that block their employment prospects (e.g., computer or technical skills, English or French language, literacy and numeracy)
- ✓ Lacking prior learning in social skills (e.g., expressing themselves with employers, or expressing their needs; relating appropriately to authority figures; knowing what they can and can't say on the job)
- ✓ Overestimating or underestimating their skills and abilities
- ✓ Having trouble transferring prior learning; feeling that they have nothing to offer—again, a self-confidence issue
- ✓ Feeling that they have lost their prior occupational learning after burnout, etc.

What clients need to learn

- ✓ Finding out what they are good at through talking to counsellors. *Key to success:* finding this out indirectly by getting them to speak about their hobbies (what they enjoy doing)
- ✓ Accepting the necessity of going back to school to acquire skills
- ✓ Knowing what their strengths and challenges are
- ✓ Meeting all the criteria, i.e., having all the skills to meet labour market requirements
- ✓ Acquiring new occupational training
- ✓ Upgrading their skills
- ✓ Staying motivated—appreciating that finding a job takes time and effort
- ✓ Acquiring work experience
- ✓ Adapting their prior learning
- ✓ Putting their skills into words and selling themselves to an employer
- ✓ Making cold calls on employers and promoting their skills
- ✓ Transferring their skills from one job/context/situation to another
- ✓ Making connections between their past experience and the skills they have acquired
- ✓ Becoming aware of their skills
- ✓ Realizing that skills can be developed in many contexts, not just work

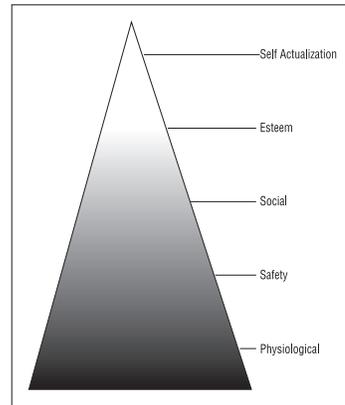
- ✓ Understanding that they have acquired skills through their past experience, even in cases where they have little work experience
- ✓ Continuing to use the skills they have developed
- ✓ Talking about their skills without making judgements and selling themselves short (e.g., learning not to say things like, “I’m good at that, but not good enough”)

Client preparation for a job search /interview

- ✓ Knowing how to prepare a curriculum vitae (c.v.) and letter of introduction
- ✓ Negotiating when they can't “sell” themselves
- ✓ Gaining knowledge of the labour market
- ✓ Gaining exposure to the workplace
- ✓ Acquiring specific information and tools
- ✓ Targeting the jobs they are looking for
- ✓ Knowing the hidden job market, not just replying to newspaper ads
- ✓ Becoming involved in the employment process (e.g., registering for a course to access training, filling out forms)
- ✓ Using their interests and current abilities to their advantage in a short-term occupation while making long-term plans that would involve training and developing more skills
- ✓ Being realistic in their expectations—making concessions to get a new job (e.g., regarding lower salary, fewer benefits, travelling too far from home—this last one may be the result of a lack of transportation, not of unwillingness)
- ✓ Acquiring knowledge of the job market—expanding their horizons beyond what they have always done, what they know, what is most familiar
- ✓ Developing a network of contacts
- ✓ Being able to discuss their salary expectations
- ✓ Quitting a job that is not right for them

Conceptualizing clients' needs

Clients present themselves to counsellors with needs profiles as individual as they are. After seeing many clients, however, patterns start to emerge and a common set of needs and appropriate strategies for dealing with them can be identified. Maslov conveniently grouped the needs that clients have in common in his famous hierarchy:



Uncovering clients' real needs

Typically, when they come through the door, clients present themselves with a specific need—e.g., they need help preparing a c.v., finding job leads, presenting themselves at interviews, etc. In the course of their visit, clients often reveal that, in addition to having the need with which they presented themselves, they have other, more immediate and pressing needs. Perhaps they need to find adequate housing, overcome substance abuse, or heal from domestic violence. Counsellors must uncover the real needs of their clients in order to properly address their challenges in relation to skills and employment.

Identifying challenges and taking advantage of opportunities

Once counsellors have identified the different barriers that given clients face, their role is to walk with the clients through a series of doors, representing the broad categories of their needs, whether physiological, relating to their safety, or bearing on their sense of belonging, self-esteem or self-actualization. To open those doors, counsellors need to work with their clients to

identify the challenges their clients face at every stage of this journey, and clients must learn to recognize and take advantage of opportunities as they arise to overcome their challenges. Throughout their journey, clients build their skills by doing and reflecting. Skills development is emphatically not something that comes only at the end of the journey with their counsellor.

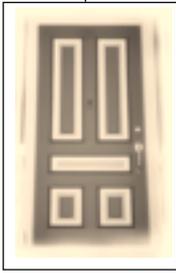
Building a trusting relationship

Before embarking on this skills development journey and, ultimately, successfully completing it, counsellors must first gain the confidence of their clients and build a trusting relationship with them. Building this relationship is crucial because, without it, counsellors cannot help clients to value themselves and think and act in ways that support their own growth and development. Moreover, developing this trusting relationship is itself a skill-building exercise because it opens clients' hearts and minds to themselves, to what they have to offer and to opportunities that will enable them to share those skills.

Once this relationship is established, clients and their counsellors can co-operate to open a series of skill-building doors that carry clients towards job readiness.

In the discussion that follows, the keys to opening each door consist in taking advantage of skill-building opportunities to meet challenges. In a subsequent product (*Effective Practices Towards Becoming Job Ready*), activities that support skill building in each area of need will be described.

It should be noted that there is some communication between the different doors because human needs cannot be compartmentalized. For example, the entire counselling process is about building a relationship of trust. Still, based on the information from our interviews, the following five-door model is consistent with counsellors' experience in meeting their clients' needs. Counsellors generally use this model first to determine whether they are, in fact, the best person to meet the client's needs; and then to structure their interventions. They do so prior to building a strong relationship with their clients.



Door 1 — Meeting basic needs

The first task of the counsellor during an intake interview is to determine whether the basic needs of a client have been met (e.g., food, clothing, shelter, psychological well-being); and to refer them to specific services.

CHALLENGES (for the Client)

- Grieving the loss of a former job
- Coming to grips with lengthy absences from the labour market
- Becoming more informed about available community resources, which they may need over a long term
- Overcoming personal problems that hamper job entry (e.g., addiction or substance abuse, emotional problems, domestic violence, depression)
- Dealing with stress
- Keeping a job, especially for very unstable clients who move often
- Getting counselling

RELATIONSHIP-BUILDING STRATEGIES (Note: this is raw data only; there is no one-to-one relationship between the challenges listed above and the strategies listed here)

- Tackling personal problems (e.g., dress, nutrition, depression, addiction) first
- Helping clients meet their basic needs before considering employment possibilities, such as finding an apartment, getting around the city, buying clothing, accessing social assistance
- Properly identifying all of their clients' needs (e.g., basic, academic, interpersonal)



Door 2 — Establishing a relationship of trust

Once a client has had their basic needs met, the counsellor can start to build a relationship of trust with the client, which is the beginning of skills development.

CHALLENGES (for the Counsellor)

- Starting with individuals as they are
- Motivating clients—seeking them out, engaging their attention, keeping them involved when the process requires greater personal involvement from them
- Spurring clients to independent action when they would be inclined to quit, nipping self-sabotage in the bud (e.g., when it comes to calling an employer or doing interview simulations)
- Getting clients to take responsibility for, and ownership of, their destiny
- Encouraging clients to accept appropriate help
- Breaking clients' cycle of dependency (whether on a situation or on a counsellor), especially in the case of clients who have received social assistance for several years
- Clarifying boundaries of their role (e.g., "I can help you with this plan, but I can't help you with that one; it's up to you")
- Taking individual needs into consideration, even when working in a group
- Constantly listening to the group and being flexible
- Using their language — start where they start; "Go in their door and take them out your door"
- Maintaining continuity with clients, especially when they pop in and out
- Fully assessing the clients' needs, because counsellors can miss something and lose their clients.

- Taking all of a client's successes into account, going at their pace and giving them time
- Constantly reassuring clients—addressing their fears—so that they do not quit before they start the job-search process
- Focussing intervention strategies on clients' strengths to help them develop a sense of competence
- Following up with better educated clients—typically, they only want help preparing a c.v. ; they are often unaware that their employability problem goes beyond preparing one
- Getting clients to express personal values, motivation; trainers can fairly easily point out their clients' generic skills
- Conveying the message that barriers can be overcome
- Rebuilding a positive self-image (“I’ve lost everything. I can’t concentrate anymore.”)
- Helping clients deal with the stress of going back to their former employer
- Seeing how to help their clients meet employer requirements, given their clients' educational limitations
- Awakening their clients' intrinsic motivation to go back to school, stay in a program, etc.
- Finding out what their clients are thinking or feeling—when they lack confidence in themselves they don't reveal these things easily
- Keeping up-to-date with social and labour market realities

RELATIONSHIP-BUILDING STRATEGIES (Note: this is raw data only; there is no one-to-one relationship between the challenges listed above and the strategies listed here)

- Finding and kindling clients' internal spark of motivation. *Key to success:* understanding that a lack of motivation may be based on fear
- Helping clients own their problems (e.g., not always say “It’s not my fault”) because they cannot act before they do so. Some tend to put everything in their counsellors' hands; they have trouble getting involved and making an effort
- Simplifying programming to make it relevant and meaningful for participants
- Showing clients' respect and openness (i.e., not being judgemental)
- Addressing their clients' fears before opening up the subject of their expectations
- Being patient with clients and supporting them as they go at their own pace



Door 3 — Creating a sense of belonging and connectedness

A huge part of helping a client become work-ready lies in helping them with their social skills so that they feel like they are part of a community (including the world of work) and that others see them that way as well.

CHALLENGES (for the Client)

- Learning when to defend themselves and to avoid being defensive
- Becoming included socially
- Overcoming culture shock
- Being able to integrate themselves into city life (e.g., find an apartment, take the bus)
- Avoiding taking their personal problems to work
- Escaping isolation—receiving moral support

RELATIONSHIP-BUILDING STRATEGIES (Note: this is raw data only; there is no one-to-one relationship between the challenges listed above and the strategies listed here)

- Working on clients' interpersonal skills—encouraging clients to become aware of the importance of maintaining emotional distance on the job

- Working with clients on the attitudes employers look for on the job and expect of employees
- Encouraging clients to be honest with themselves (e.g., “I don’t have a good attitude; that’s why I lose jobs”)
- Having clients work on their problem-solving skills by talking in a group about what they do when they feel overwhelmed, as a way of considering different options
- Giving clients opportunities to have a positive experience speaking and listening and exchanging ideas
- Working on social skills before starting on job entry, or moving on to job-specific training or further education
- Having clients use role play to become aware of the impact of their behaviour and to address their challenges in simulated activities (e.g., a client who feels uncomfortable making telephone calls or performing well in an interview situation can practise in a group and develop strategies that will help in real situations)
- Having clients play the role of an employer to underscore for themselves the combination of skills, attitudes and behaviours employers are looking for
- Having clients help each other develop skills (e.g., getting one client to show another client how to use word processing software)
- Performing activities that require the use of communication and teamwork skills



Door 4 — Building self-confidence and engaging clients in their own employment process

In order to prepare the way for clients to be able to make viable action plans for themselves, counsellors need to help clients appreciate their own self-worth, to validate their clients’ interests and passions and to build successful experiences with them.

CHALLENGES (for the Client)

- Gaining self-confidence (for women, this could also mean feeling self-assured in their choices in life)
- Gaining self-awareness (whether through introspection, reflection, or the constructive use of feedback; by relating to their past and understanding and taking responsibility for the consequences of their actions)
- Building up their self-esteem (becoming aware of their own value)
- Having successful (work, learning, personal) experiences
- Overcoming fears of failure, of not being rehired
- Becoming involved in the process of gaining employment
- Overcoming their own resistance to change, including going back to school
- Overcoming attitude problems, especially towards employers (e.g., having conflicts with co-workers, maintaining their personal appearance, being impatient, not being punctual, having difficulty communicating, being aggressive, not being resourceful enough, lacking strategy, not knowing how to negotiate with people)
- Overcoming their fears of the future and experiencing insecurity
- Providing evidence of how they demonstrate their skills

RELATIONSHIP-BUILDING STRATEGIES (Note: this is raw data only; there is no one-to-one relationship between the challenges listed above and the strategies listed here)

- Teaching clients how to look at and recognize themselves

- Helping individuals recognize the skills in the things they do or can do and feel comfortable talking about their skills. *Key to success:* helping clients overcome their natural modesty or feeling that promoting themselves is bragging
- Recognizing their successes (unfair comparisons with others or negativity impedes this) *Key to success:* motivating individuals, setting them up for success, supporting them through successful learning experiences
- Spending time talking about the positive aspects of their situation—e.g., age has its advantages: older workers are more productive, have more experience, have a better work ethic, have better relations with others
- Having clients describe their achievements (activities, courses, volunteer work, involvement in parent committees, sports associations, etc.) and to extract their skills from their successes
- Identifying generic skills at home and in the workplace to help clients recognize the skills they have and be able to talk about them
- Aiming to walk clients one step at a time through small successes, to gradually rebuild their self-efficacy (e.g., before asking them to write a letter of introduction, trainers ask their clients to produce a rough outline of their action plans)
- Working on helping clients transfer the skills they have acquired at home as a starting point (e.g., getting them to make the connection between taking care of children and being responsible, which is a transferable skill)
- Exploring their clients' potential only after they feel confident about the skills they have acquired at home or through education and recreational activities, etc.
- Having clients work in groups of three to identify one quality that best describes each person as a way of building their self-esteem
- Having clients talk about an achievement of theirs and show off something they have done in the past to give them recognition for their achievements
- Getting clients to talk about their c.v., rather than just showing them how to prepare it, help them recognize their skills and achievements and gain confidence in themselves
- Telling clients stories of people who have gone from rags to riches (e.g., Colonel Sanders) and encouraging them to tell their own stories, highlighting their challenges, how they overcame them and their skills
- Having clients take control of the process of helping themselves (e.g., having them write all the problems they are facing on the board and helping them eliminate problems they can't solve on their own and helping them find solutions to the ones they can solve)

Door 5 — Planning and following through



Once a client has a measure of self-confidence, he/she can begin to develop action plans in relation to further skills development and employment—and actually follow through on those plans.

CHALLENGES (for the Client)

- Gaining hope, having a purpose, knowing where they are going
- Maintaining their lifestyle while changing careers (this relates to being realistic in their expectations)
- Overcoming financial challenges

RELATIONSHIP-BUILDING STRATEGIES (Note: this is raw data only; there is no one-to-one relationship between the challenges listed above and the strategies listed here)

- Making clients aware that their plans are not always realistic. *Key to success:* breaking their plans down into steps they can and need to take

- Helping clients understand that employers are not going to offer them a job; they have to go out and look for it
- Encouraging clients to dream, see themselves in their future and think about how they are going to get there
- Connecting their clients' passions and interests with possible career paths and then linking jobs with skills as a way of opening up and making relevant for their clients the subject of their clients' skills and the skill needs of the job
- Using structured, time-limited work experience placements to build their clients' skills in a safe and non-threatening way—typically, clients are mentored in the workplace by a co-worker and given constructive feedback that helps them develop and recognize their skills
- Organizing industry visits and visits to occupational training centres to enable clients to explore particular occupational areas and see workplace expectations and skill requirements for themselves in a safe, non-threatening way
- Encouraging them to make informed career choices based on their skills or potential. *Key to success:* relating skills or potential to recognizing and overcoming barriers
- Practising skills by playing out scenarios, i.e., in an environment that still allows for skills development
- Getting clients to emphasize their skills first and their experience second (especially when they do not have a lot of workplace experience)
- Building clients' trust and self-esteem before exploring possible career paths with them
- Having clients identify the skills required to perform a job they like as an initial step to having them assess the skills they have and those they may need
- Having clients get out and meet employers (knock on doors, talk to them)
- Having clients go to the corner store and observe how employees model their skills (e.g., deal with customers) as a vehicle for developing their own interpersonal skills

New Approaches to Skills Counselling

The counsellors and trainers we interviewed were innovative in:

- Treating each stage in the client assessment/development process from initial intake to job/training placement as a skill-building opportunity, rather than regarding skills development as a separate activity that takes place after a client is assessed
- Addressing clients' challenges with regard to social skills before moving them into job-specific training or education in order to ensure the success of their training and education
- Focussing on supporting clients as they achieve small successes in order to set them up for the larger successes they will achieve on their own
- Unlocking the secrets of motivation that empower clients to believe

in themselves and gain control of their lives

- Developing clients' employability skills instead of merely assisting them with their job-search techniques

Benefits of Skills Counselling for Learners

- Get results over time, experience success
- Are honest with themselves, reflect, gain self-awareness, enhance their self-esteem
- Have references to put in their c.v.
- Acquire skills that help them keep their jobs
- Get engaged, take charge of what happens to them, own their successes
- Are empowered, learn how to use their resources, organize their lives more effectively
- Develop the positive attitudes they need to succeed in the job market

Generic skills development programming (including programming to support the development of literacy skills) is scarcely available or inadequately funded for those outside of the publicly funded education system who are making transitions into the labour market.

- Acquire perseverance
- Become independent
- Find a job that suits them, go back to school, get involved in an activity (e.g., volunteer work), or start a business project
- Develop realistic action plans, including back-up plans, and meet their objectives, which help them feel good about themselves
- Develop networks of contacts, build positive relationships with others
- Go to interviews and express themselves
- Make positive changes in their situation, which lays a foundation for further success

Benefits of Skills Counselling for Employers

- Have access to individuals who are genuinely ready to work
- Contribute to making labour market information relevant
- Help ensure that Canada maintains a highly skilled workforce

Benefits of Skills Counselling for Governments

- ✓ Meet their objective of developing a highly skilled workforce capable of meeting the challenges of keeping Canada competitive in the global economy
- ✓ Ensure that job-specific training is successful when governments help to adequately prepare people for employment readiness

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

Running through all the interviews were a few common messages. It appears that:

- ✓ *Generic skills development programming (including programming to support the development of literacy skills) is scarcely available or inadequately funded for those outside of the publicly funded education system who are making transitions into the labour market.* The generic skill

needs of Canadians who are not in school, or are currently unemployed, tend to fall through the cracks in the division of responsibilities between the federal and provincial governments. Broadly speaking, the federal government regards itself as having responsibility for providing labour market information, including skills and career information, while the provincial and territorial governments see themselves as responsible for funding job-specific training.

- *It is important to strengthen the linkages between the practitioners who are engaged in career counselling and skills development and the decision makers at the policy and program levels who determine spending priorities*
- ✓ *Labour market information resources need to be more closely focussed on end users and supported by one-on-one counselling in the area of identifying and developing their generic skills and connecting them with appropriate resources.* Adequately identifying clients' needs in relation to generic skills and providing coaching and support as they build some of those skills is an important factor in making labour market information meaningful to them and, afterwards, in making their job-specific training effective. By addressing clients' most immediate needs first, they can make more informed career choices and put their job training to work. Often, this can be accomplished only when counsellors have the time and resources to build one-on-one relationships with their clients in the skills area.
- ✓ *We need to work at creating a process for providing a better fit between clients' interests and needs on the one hand and skills shortages in, and training opportunities for, the labour market on the other—i.e., if trainers see that clients need to develop their employability skills, they should be able to provide that support instead of routing them into job-specific training for which the clients are not suited or interested.*

It is important to strengthen the linkages between the practitioners who are engaged in career counselling and skills development and the decision makers at the policy and program levels who determine spending priorities.

▶ In the current system, generic skills development is not specifically funded, although such skills are the key to being prepared for employment.

▶ Without having the time and resources to honour their clients' needs in the area of generic skills, counsellors are at risk of endangering the success of any intervention they might try.

- ✓ In the current system, generic skills development is not specifically funded, although such skills are the key to being prepared for employment. Generic skills development is not a dispensable item; it is an integral part of every stage of the process of making labour market transitions. Counsellors need the time and resources to include generic skills programming at every stage—from a client's initial approach for information, through the counsellor's assessment of their needs, to job/training placement and beyond. To treat generic skills development as a separate entity from employment training is to fail to recognize the importance of having the self-confidence to build skills and miss important opportunities to develop those skills, attitudes and behaviours that are required to get and keep a job and make progress in employment.
- ✓ Without having the time and resources to honour their clients' needs in the area of generic skills, counsellors are at risk of endangering the success of any intervention they might try. Helping put into place the background conditions for their clients' success (setting them up for success and building up their repertoire of successful experiences) is perhaps the most important thing that trainers/counsellors do. This work needs to be formally acknowledged and/or supported. Ideally, counsellors would have the time, tools and financial resources to facilitate their clients' skills development up to the point where training, further education, entry into the labour market or reintegration into their communities make sense and are effective.

Recommendations

Next Steps for the Short Term

The Conference Board proposes that HRDC produce, in conjunction with the Conference Board, an "effective practices

style" reader, under joint HRDC–Conference Board logos, to outline for community-based trainers and counsellors practical exercises they can use with their clients to help them become job-ready. A possible title for this reader might be *Effective Practices Towards Becoming Job-Ready*.

The purpose of this reader would be to provide community-based trainers and counsellors with a "toolkit" of proven, practical skill-building exercises. They could use these exercises with their clients to build their self-confidence and raise their awareness of the skills they have and the ways in which those skills are used in the world of work to help them become more job-ready and ease their transition into the labour market.

This reader would add value by:

- ✓ Focussing attention on strategies for relationship building and teasing out the skills component embedded in every stage of the process of making labour market transitions—from a client's initial approach for information, through the counsellor's assessment of their needs, to job/training placement and beyond
- ✓ Taking advantage of the skills development opportunities associated with every stage of the process of making labour market transitions
- ✓ Providing practical support for building skills at every stage of the process of making labour market transitions

Next Steps for the Medium Term—Extending the Skills Partnership

1. Complete *Your Skills Profiler: Three easy steps to identifying your skills, attitudes and behaviours . . . and marketing yourself!*
2. To create an active provincial/national partnership to:
 - identify the most useful skills interventions
 - identify what's still missing
 - generate continuous up-to-date feedback and recommendations

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*Thanks to all those
community based
trainors and career
counsellors who
participated in our
interviews.*

- ensure the supply of current information that continuously evolves and addresses today's needed skills and practices
- 3. Mobilize these *Make the Skills Connection* resources through the networks and partnerships created in the course of doing the research
- 4. Track how counsellors are using these products
- 5. Identify ways to increase the use of these materials to enhance Canadians' generic skills and help them make more successful labour market transitions
- 6. Build partnerships with the provinces and territories to open up discussion on bringing forward solutions for providing generic skills development programming for Canadians

Next Steps for the Longer Term—Developing a Best Practices Model

1. Develop a best practices model
2. Design a reflective template that would help organizations measure the effectiveness of their skills training programs

Such a model would:

- ✓ require practitioners to demonstrate need and show results
- ✓ need to be field-tested with clients in order to determine what counts as a legitimate need and what are appropriate results.

In order to be accountable, skills programs and resources could use this model to address the criteria outlined in the best practices model. This model would help to set parameters for developing and funding skills programs.

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