



Slocan Group/Canadian Forest Products — Mackenzie

Workplace Literacy Mini Case Study

Overview

The Slocan Group was a forestry sector company operating a production facility in Mackenzie, British Columbia. Most of its nearly 500 production employees at the Mackenzie location were adults that had not been in any formal learning environment for many years. This lack of exposure to learning created anxiety when workers were confronted with on-the-job training. To reduce these barriers to skill acquisition, Slocan worked with the union to create an on-site adult learning centre in 1996.

Slocan was purchased by Canadian Forest Products Ltd. (Canfor) in 2004. Canfor continues to support workplace literacy programs at the Mackenzie facility.

Objectives

The goals of the adult learning centre were to:

- ⇒ teach literacy skills that would be relevant for employees;
- ⇒ foster a positive workplace culture of learning; and
- ⇒ establish cooperative communication with the union.

Activities

The Slocan Group created a 24-hour, on-site learning environment so that its employees, along with their spouses, could learn on “neutral” territory. Here “learning” was stressed over “training,” to convey a less regimented and less intimidating approach. Participants attended classes on their own time, but on a flexible schedule to suit their work and personal commitments.

The program’s curriculum was customized to address participants’ skill needs with an appropriate level of complexity, thus allowing participants to face comfortable learning

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challenges. Once participants became reacquainted with the process of learning, they could move on to higher levels of achievement in areas from basic literacy to computer training, and participation in workshops and off-site training.

Nearly 100 participants completed the top-tier off-site courses, for which the company paid the tuition “up-front.” Both union and management representatives attended student graduation days to recognize the achievements of the participants.

Achievements

The on-site adult learning centre has realized the following:

- ⇒ nearly 400 participants have attended the program;
- ⇒ both management and employees have regarded the learning centre with a sense of ownership; and
- ⇒ Slocan and the union have cooperated on a mutually beneficial endeavour.

Benefits

The on-site learning centre has benefited Slocan by:

- ⇒ increasing the morale of employees;
- ⇒ encouraging cooperative problem solving between management and the union; and
- ⇒ developing workers that are ready and willing to undertake future training.

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