

# Marketing and Selling Essential Skills

A Guide for College & Institute Practitioners



Association of Canadian  
Community Colleges

Canada

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**Collège Gérald-Godin**

**Collège Lionel-Groulx**

**Conestoga College Institute of Technology and Advanced Learning**

**Douglas College**

**Fanshawe College**

**Georgian College**

**Holland College**

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## Introduction

Canadian colleges and institutes provide excellence in education and training to build and maintain a strong Canadian workforce. Working in partnership with employers, colleges and institutes are uniquely positioned to provide solutions that help working Canadians improve their productivity and safety performance through the development of their Essential Skills.

Essential Skills are the skills people need for work, learning and life. They are the foundation for learning all other skills and the cornerstone of lifelong learning. Essential skills are used in virtually all occupations and throughout daily life in different forms and at different levels of complexity. The Essential Skills identified by Human Resources and Social Development Canada (HRSDC) are:

- **Reading Text**
- **Numeracy**
- **Oral Communication**
- **Thinking Skills**
- **Continuous Learning**
- **Document Use**
- **Writing**
- **Working with Others**
- **Computer Use**

## Purpose of the Guide

This Guide provides applications, case studies and strategies for effectively marketing and selling Essential Skills solutions to employers. Included are a collection of current Essential Skills resources, lessons learned and 10 key recommendations provided by Essential Skills practitioners working with employers in small, medium and large enterprises across Canada.

This Guide is intended as a starting point for:

- Contract trainers who promote and sell their institution's services and are looking for new fields to investigate and new revenue streams. Applications describing how businesses across Canada use Essential Skills and tools such as TOWES (Test of Workplace Essential Skills) are provided to guide marketing and selling activities.
- Trainers and instructors who seek new, innovative ways to deliver and teach workers the skills needed to be productive and safe.

## Project History

This Guide is directly related to the Integration of *Essential Skills into Workplace-based Human Resources Practices Project*, funded by HRSDC and managed by ACCC. The Project started February 1<sup>st</sup>, 2006 and ended September 30<sup>th</sup>, 2007.

The main objective of the Project was to encourage businesses to become more aware of and adopt Essential Skills as a means to continuously update the competencies, productivity and safety performance of their employees. The Project also aimed to improve the practical knowledge of college/institute Essential Skills practitioners to enable them to implement improved Essential Skills solutions in the workplace by:

- sensitizing businesses to the importance of incorporating Essential Skills within their companies;
- supporting the implementation of an individualized Essential Skills practical approach with each participating company;
- applying and testing specific Essential Skills instruments and models for use in businesses;
- developing practical Essential Skills workplace intervention capacity among colleges/institutes; and,
- disseminating to the national network of colleges/institutes, ACCC partners and HRSDC the results of the Essential Skills implementations realized during the course of the project.

The results of the Project included:

- almost 375 Canadian businesses and their employees sensitized to Essential Skills;
- all businesses involved had access to free Essential Skills assessments and human resource planning;
- some 65 employers and their employees integrating practical essential Skills approaches into their organizations; and,
- nineteen colleges/institutes improving their capacity to provide employers with Essential Skills solutions.

## Applications

The successful integration of Essential Skills training and awareness has enhanced business operations across the country. While the ways in which Essential Skills are used varies greatly across business and industry sectors, there are several common applications.

### Succession and Progression Planning

Essential Skills are used by business in effective succession planning. For example, a forest products company and Marine Atlantic, two large companies located on Canada's east coast, use modified Essential Skills profiles ([www.hrsdc-rhdcc.gc.ca/essentialskills](http://www.hrsdc-rhdcc.gc.ca/essentialskills)) and TOWES ([www.towes.ca](http://www.towes.ca)) to help identify workers most likely to succeed as specialized equipment operators. These companies use customized HRSDC Essential Skills profiles to determine the skills required of machine operators and TOWES to gauge the Essential Skills proficiencies of workers who wish to operate the equipment. (See page 8 – Case Studies – to learn more about the experience of the forest products company with Essential Skills.)

### Training and Workforce Development

The following examples show how the Essential Skills framework is being used by large, medium and small businesses across Canada to provide their workers with focused, work-based training.

- A fast-growing catering business in Québec, Service Cuisine G.P. Inc. worked with Collège Lionel-Groulx to develop a customized training plan linking Essential Skills to actual job tasks in its operations. Each task was reviewed and linked to the appropriate Essential Skills profile resulting in a detailed analysis that provided an authentic work-based foundation for the training plan. (See page 14 – Case Studies – to learn more about Service Cuisine G.P. Inc.)
- Kahkewistahaw Gas and Convenience Store, an award-winning Petro Canada gas station located in Saskatchewan, and Parkland Regional College developed and launched a successful Essential Skills training program for their First Nations workers. (See page 11 – Case Studies – to learn more about Kahkewistahaw Petro Canada.)
- Colt Engineering, an international company with Canadian offices in Ontario and Alberta, developed unique staff training plans, including

- customized Essential Skills profiles for engineers, to meet their company mission of “Safety: An Ongoing Commitment.”
- Elmira Truck Services Limited, which has provided quality Fleet Maintenance for over 35 years, implemented Essential Skills testing and training resulting in a more engaged and confident workforce. (See page 17 – Case Studies – to learn more about Elmira Truck Services Limited.)

## Recruitment and Retention

Industry values the practical way in which Essential Skills profiles can identify and describe the actual competencies and skills required of workers. Companies such as Challenger Motor Freight and Pro Electric Inc. of Ontario, and others from a wide variety of industries including construction, oil and gas, manufacturing, pulp and paper, power generation, transportation, aerospace, security and mining use Essential Skills assessments to screen in – not screen out – workers. Knowing that potential employees have the threshold skill levels needed, employers can hire with confidence. Statistical and anecdotal research shows that workers with higher levels of Essential Skills have higher job satisfaction rates and stronger labour market attachments.

### Case Studies

Of the many successful Essential Skills interventions conducted during the Project, four are presented in this Guide as case studies. They represent Essential Skills activities in terms of the various strategies, applications and sizes of businesses to which they have been applied.

The colleges/institutes and companies involved in these case studies were:

- Case 1 Nova Scotia Community College (with Bow Valley College) and a Forest Products Company
- Case 2 Parkland Regional College and Kahkewistahaw Gas and Convenience Store
- Case 3 Collège Lionel-Groulx and Service Cuisine G.P. Inc.
- Case 4 Conestoga College and Elmira Truck Services Limited

## Case 1

# Applications of Essential Skills in the Forest Products Industry

*Note: The company and its spokesperson are not named in this document, to comply with the company's communication policy.*

When the human resource development leader at one of Canada's largest forest products companies first saw the list of nine Essential Skills, he thought they were a good way to break down skills. So he wrote them on a piece of paper, tucked the list in his desk and promptly forgot about it.

It was months later when he realized the value of that piece of paper.

*"We were in the midst of a labour dispute, negotiating a new collective agreement, when we looked at the language and realized that we could consider the skills and ability of employees, in addition to seniority. It was always there; we just didn't use it. I started thinking, 'How can we measure the ability to do a job in a standardized, objective way?'"*

He approached the local community college for a test to measure aptitude.

*"The college tried to convince me that instead of measuring aptitude, we should measure Essential Skills. They are a much better indication of how well a person can perform on a specific job, and where they might need to improve."*

*"I remembered the list of Essential Skills in my desk, but I still didn't buy-in."* He returned to his office with a stack of information that sat untouched for a few months.

The light finally came on when he visited the Human Resources and Social Development Canada Essential Skills website: [http://srv108.services.gc.ca/english/general/home\\_e.shtml](http://srv108.services.gc.ca/english/general/home_e.shtml). It contains hundreds of Essential Skills profiles developed by the federal government based on in-depth research with Canadian workers. The profiles are available online at no charge and they are commonly used by industry and educational institutions to develop curriculum and enhance human resource practices.

*"I typed in 'pulp and paper' and up came the Pulp Mill Machine Operators profile (NOC 9432). I read the profile and thought, 'That's us! That's exactly what we do.' It all fit together in a job profile I could relate to."*

The company arranged to "test-drive" TOWES (Test of Workplace Essential Skills), an Essential Skills assessment provided by Bow Valley College in Calgary, Alberta. Six staff members who had experience on the front line completed the TOWES assessment and when the results were in, they knew they had a winner.

Human Resources approached management with plan to integrate Essential Skills into their line of progression. With the buy-in of one operating department, they began crafting a job profile specific to a new position within the company.

*"We downloaded as many Essential Skills profiles as we could find that were a good fit, locked ourselves in a room and built a customized profile in an hour-and-a-half,"* says the human resources development leader. *"When we were done, our supervisors confirmed – that's the job."*

***"When we got the assessment results, the curtain lifted."***

With the labour dispute over, the company tested 35 employees in the paper machine lines of progression that were selected to move up to new positions.

*"They were a little nervous at first but they knew their jobs were secure; they were grandfathered. We explained that it was all about skill development."*

*"When we got the assessment results, the curtain lifted. It explained why some people always had trouble."*

Only one of the 35 test-takers met the Essential Skills requirements, which had complexity level ratings of 3 (reading text), 4 (document use) and 3 (numeracy). The Human Resources department was not surprised by these numbers. Forty-two percent of Canadians lack the skills required of a knowledge-based economy – and that percentage is even higher in rural areas.

*"Despite what people may think, Canada is not competitive as a country in pulp and paper. We generally have old machinery and we haven't developed our skills and knowledge. To compete with countries like China, Finland or Brazil, we need the Essential Skills necessary to function productively and*

*safely,” explains the Human Resources Development Leader. “We have to set ourselves up with the right equipment, the right people and the right product if we want to transform from traditional paper-making to a more modern environment.”*

The company found similar results as more employees were tested.

*“As we began applying the model to other departments and parts of the paper machine line, it explained a lot of the challenges we faced at the mill. We had a pool of people with low Essential Skills scores, so we had to ask ourselves – how do we address this?”*

***“Human Resources approached management with a plan to integrate Essential Skills into our line of progression.”***

The company worked in partnership with Nova Scotia Community College – its local college, Bow Valley College in Calgary and the

provincial department of education to build an assessment and training program designed to increase reading and document use scores – the two Essential Skills areas that were weak. Employees attend class at the college for 2.5 hours each week on their own time and course costs are covered by the company.

*“The union likes the fact that we have a training course for employees,”* says the Human Resources Development Leader.

*“This is win-win for everyone,”* he adds, referring to the Essential Skills model. *“We now have a standardized way to match skills to jobs and we are developing ways to help employees improve their skills so they can get the job they want.”*

## Case 2

# Kahkewistahaw Gas and Convenience Store and Essential Skills

*Kahkewistahaw Gas and Convenience Store is an independent Petro-Canada station located in Yorkton, Saskatchewan that has won numerous awards for outstanding service and commitment to employee development. Owned and operated by the Kahkewistahaw Band, it is open seven days a week, 24-hours a day, and employs 24 people – 94 percent of whom are First Nations.*

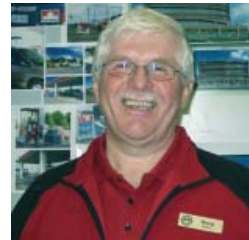
***“Training was great. It made me think a lot, and I learned a lot about myself and my co-workers.”***

*– Ivan Cote*

When you visit Yorkton, Saskatchewan, drop by the Kahkewistahaw Gas and Convenience Store. It

is more than your average service station – it’s an award-winning operation, thanks in part to a commitment to developing employees’ Essential Skills.

When General Manager Doug McRae was hired in 2004 by the Kahkewistahaw Band to run the newly constructed gas and convenience store, his mandate was clear: create employment for First Nations people and help them develop skills for success in the workplace.



*General Manager  
Doug McRae*

Only a few years later, McRae has achieved that goal – and more. The people he’s hired have not only increased their skills and boosted their self-confidence; they’re part of a team that has been recognized for outstanding customer service and sales growth.

But it wasn’t easy...

*“The first group of employees was diverse,” says McRae. “They were 18 to 60 years old, and they had anywhere between a Grade 8 education and some post-secondary.”*

His first task was to assess their skills and build a team, which he did with the help of Parkland Regional College.



*Kahkewistahaw Gas and Convenience Store*

Before the service station opened, the 17 new hires attended a seven-week program at the College where they benchmarked their Essential Skills with a TOWES (Test of Workplace Essential Skills) assessment.

Susan Lyons, Career and Student Support Services Manager at Parkland Regional College and McRae stress that an in-depth discussion about the purpose of the Essential Skills assessment is critical.

*“Even though we explained what TOWES is about and that you couldn’t fail, the participants were stressed before the test,” Lyons explains. “We learned that you have to take more than 45 minutes to explain it.”*

McRae agrees. *“You have to sit down with all the folks and talk about what you are trying to do and what your objectives are.”*

***“Our First Nations people are realizing that they are now changing to be involved in an economic industry, taking responsibility for their own growth.”***

*– Albert (Bud) Wasacase*

When the results were in, employees did better than they expected, and it motivated them to learn. McRae

recalls one employee who really changed his attitude about his abilities. *“He said, ‘You know, I could be a lawyer.’”*

Using the College’s resources and the Measure Up website (<http://measureup.towes.com>), participants increased their Essential Skills scores, often by one or two full levels. They also received training in everything from e-mail etiquette and customer conflict to handling dangerous chemicals. To prepare for working as a team, they explored personality styles and, on their return to the worksite, they had a chance to practice their skills before the gas and convenience store opened its doors.

The program was offered through Job Start Future Skills, a provincially-funded partnership program, with support by a national Essential Skills project to integrate Essential Skills in the workplace.

***“It helped point out what my abilities are, and what I mean to a whole team. Whether you are a leader or not, your effort counts just as much.”***

***– Valerie Pelletier***

Since the gas and convenience store opened in 2004, two employee groups have completed the program.

*“Some have stayed long-term with Doug and others have moved on to bigger and better things,” explains Lyons, “and that’s okay with him. We often see people come back to the College for other programs because they are excited about learning.”*

McRae says there are many opportunities for staff who wish to stay. *“The Band is developing the 11 acres we sit on. There will be a hotel, an office complex and a new casino. We’ll need staff.”*

*If you would like to know how Essential Skills and TOWES can work for you, visit the TOWES website at [www.TOWES.ca](http://www.TOWES.ca) or phone Bow Valley College’s TOWES Department at (403) 410-3200.*

## Case 3

# The Impact of Essential Skills on Service Cuisine G.P. Inc.

*Service Cuisine G.P. Inc is a leader in the food preparation industry. It offers in-house meal preparation services for grocery stores. The company is well known for its high quality, home-style meals that cost up to 40 percent less than its competitors.*

If you reach for a healthy take-home meal at your local grocery store in Quebec, chances are it's a Service Cuisine G.P. Inc. product.

Located 50 kilometres north of Montreal in the small centre of Blainville, Service Cuisine G.P. Inc. creates everything from macaroni salad to full chicken dinners, with more than 280 recipes to choose from. But unlike pre-packaged meals that are shipped to stores for distribution, Service Cuisine G.P. Inc. meals are prepared fresh in the store by its Service Cuisine G.P. Inc. staff.



Ellen Ferlatte  
Director of Operations

Tapping into a growth industry, the company's annual sales have increased by 20 percent each year, creating a new challenge – finding skilled labour.

*"Young adults are not ready to accept entry level jobs," explains Ellen Ferlatte, Director of Operations of Service Cuisine G.P. Inc. "If someone takes hotel or food preparation studies at cégep, they expect to hold the title of 'chef' on day one."*

Instead, Service Cuisine G.P. Inc. turned its attention to unskilled labour, hiring people with little or no experience in the hotel and food preparation industry. Ferlatte soon realized that although these individuals were ready and willing to work, many lacked the basics necessary for success – such as numeracy, reading and document use skills.

Alain Girard from Collège Lionel-Groulx offered a solution. He invited the company to participate in a national project on Essential Skills, designed to support businesses integrating Essential Skills into their workplace.

Ferlatte was convinced that together they could develop the necessary tools to address the human resource challenges faced by the company.

Her first step was to visit HRSDC's Essential Skills web site ([http://srv108.services.gc.ca/english/general/home\\_e.shtml](http://srv108.services.gc.ca/english/general/home_e.shtml)). It contains hundreds of Essential Skills profiles developed by the federal government based on in-depth research with Canadian workers. The profiles are available online at no charge and are used by industry and educational institutions to develop curriculum and enhance human resource practices.

Using the Essential Skills profile for cooks (NOC 6242) as a starting point, she and Girard created a customized profile that reflected the company's unique needs.

The new profile became the foundation for a formal job description, which created a clear link between what a cook is expected to do and the Essential Skills required to perform the tasks.

According to Ferlatte, this Essential Skills approach makes it much easier to write job postings, create individualized training plans and prepare staff evaluations.

Through the national Essential Skills project, Service Cuisine G.P. Inc. continued to develop job descriptions for other positions, including cook's helper and security. They then turned their attention to skills assessment.

*"You must assess the employee's individual needs as of day one in order to create a customized training plan that will address the needs of the company,"* says Ferlatte.

At Girard's suggestion, Service Cuisine G.P. Inc. encouraged several sub-contractors to take TOWES (Test of Workplace Essential Skills), an assessment tool created to measure Essential Skills in three domains – numeracy, reading and document use. They could immediately see the value of a test that identifies specific Essential Skills gaps.

***"... annual sales have increased by 20 percent each year, creating a new challenge – finding skilled labour."***

For example, if a cook's helper needs to use fractions to follow a recipe, an Essential Skills assessment tool measures this numeracy skill using

documents found in the workplace. If specific skill gaps are identified, they can be addressed through targeted training.

Working together, Girard and Ferlatte created a tool specific to Service Cuisine G.P. Inc. that allows them to compare the Essential Skills needed to do the job with the employee's skills.

*“Time invested is well worth it and, in the long run, cost savings will be achieved.”*

The company now requires all new employees to complete the evaluation, which

targets the Essential Skills required to perform the job successfully. The results serve as a basis for an individualized training plan.

Ferlatte and Girard continue to work together to integrate Essential Skills at Service Cuisine G.P. Inc. They plan to expand the job description series and develop new recruitment tools.

While the introduction of an Essential Skills framework requires time, Ferlatte says it has been an excellent investment.

## Case 4

# Essential Skills at Elmira Truck Services Limited

Elmira Truck Services Limited, located in Elmira Ontario, has been providing quality fleet maintenance for over 35 years. Some of its services include: all aspects of truck and trailer maintenance, government safety inspections and emissions testing (diesel). In addition to its truck and trailer maintenance services, it also offers a 24-hour Cardlock advanced technology fuel management and environmentally compliant system.



*Glenn Gingrich, Service Manager  
Elmira Truck Services Limited*

Elmira employs nine people – two members of the management team, three Truck and Coach apprentices and four licensed Truck and Coach Mechanics who provide high quality and personalized service to the trucking industry. (The two managers are also Truck and Coach Mechanics.)

Currently there is a tremendous need for highly skilled, flexible Truck and Coach Mechanics to meet the challenges of Canada's growing transportation system. Stricter regulations and standards are being implemented at all levels and the changes in operational systems require constant on-the-job learning.

***"... our staff and managers witness both the direct and indirect returns of working with the Essential Skills initiative."***

In order to maintain high standards and remain current with new and developing technologies, Elmira is proud to foster workplace learning and training for staff and managers. In working with Conestoga College's Job Connect program, Elmira was pleased to participate in the integration of Essential Skills into a workplace-based human resources practices project. The company was able to have staff and managers witness both the direct and indirect returns of working with the Essential Skills initiative.

When introduced to this opportunity, Elmira decided to have two Truck and Coach apprentices and its Service Manager participate in the project. The depth and scope of the work that has been done in the area of Essential

Skills is very impressive and Elmira participants quickly realized that this was an opportunity that they needed to take advantage of.



*Elmira Truck Services Limited*

as well as those of other occupations. By working through some of the authentic workplace material as practice, they felt prepared to proceed with writing the level G-2 TOWES.

Elmira Truck Services worked with the Employment Training Consultant from the Job Connect program at Conestoga College who initially introduced the company to the Essential Skills and TOWES – “Measure-Up” websites. Business managers spent about two hours reviewing various Essential Skills profiles in order to understand the actual complexity levels of the tasks that were performed each day

Participants found that the level G-2 TOWES test used very practical applications in testing reading skills. In the area of document use, it was obvious that there was a need to retrieve information at all levels. Numeracy covered most foundational applications of math in the workplace. The broad spectrum of topics which tapped into a wide variety of knowledge and varying skill levels was impressive. Of particular interest was the variety in the types of questions and problem sets used from a variety of occupations. Writing the test proved to be a team building experience as participants shared their stories around the actual test writing.

The Employment Training Consultant met with participants in order to debrief and review individual TOWES results and how the gaps that were identified might be addressed. The Essential Skill requirements for Truck and Coach Mechanic are as follows: Reading Text 3, Document Use 3 and Numeracy 2. While Elmira was pleased with the results, the scores reflected that some participants had struggled somewhat with Document Use. With the coaching of the Training Consultant, the decision was made to proceed with some upskilling in workplace document use. Given that the scores were close to the actual requirements, it was decided to proceed with self-directed study, using some of the material provided by the Training Consultant who remains a facilitator and guide when required.

Participants said they could not be more pleased with this experience. It provided each of them with the opportunity to assess and validate

individual capacity and skills. And, through the results provided in a contextualized manner, facilitated an understanding of why some people may sometimes struggle with certain tasks, especially in terms of the ability to work faster and smarter in a very fast paced work environment.

As a result of this experience, participants have seen small changes in how they work – the young apprentices have become more engaged and react to situations with enhanced confidence and ability. There is a greater commitment to their educational goals given that they recognize that they can be successful in the in-class portion of their training.

As an organization, Elmira Truck Services will continue to promote enhanced training opportunities, skills development and mentorship in order to develop a lifelong learning attitude. *“We are proud to have played a role in this project.”*

## Marketing and Selling Essential Skills

Effectively marketing and selling Essential Skills starts with a specific business plan built by looking strategically within and outside your institution.

### Getting Started

#### Assess your Institution's Capacity to Sell Essential Skills

Essential Skills make better sense to employers when they are presented as part of a package; not as a stand-alone product. Look at your institution's product suite and see where Essential Skills might naturally fit. If there is no fit, don't force it. If there is a fit, then look at human resources and capacity. Institutions that have been most successful in marketing Essential Skills are those that have both fit and sufficient in-house resources. Your Essential Skills practitioner should have a good practical knowledge of Essential Skills to ensure successful integration into various workplaces.

#### Build an Essential Skills Network Inside your Institution

Essential Skills activities may be happening in many parts of your institution and under many different names: trades, college preparation, contract training or program outcomes. Before talking to employers, talk to your colleagues inside the institution, bring your resources together and get everyone "on message" when talking about Essential Skills.

#### Essential Skills + Sales Skills = Success

Be smart about using the expertise you have. When talking with employers, use the sales expertise in your institution to introduce broad Essential Skills concepts and make the deal. Then use faculty and contractors with specialized Essential Skills knowledge to design workplace training plans, write training materials, and develop profiles, job descriptions and tools.

### Assess your Market

Experience shows that some businesses are more likely than others to consider using Essential Skills approaches. Predictors to look for when evaluating whether a business is likely to consider Essential Skills include the following:

- Company size – Businesses that are relatively large, have formal human resource departments and are unionized are often more interested than smaller companies.

- Line of business – Companies engaged in activities that are high-risk from an occupational health and safety and security standpoint, such as manufacturing and trucking, may have a higher level of interest.
- Production challenges – Businesses experiencing problems brought on by shortages of skilled labour, an aging workforce and new requirements around legislation and quality control are generally more receptive to Essential Skills solutions.
- Attitudes towards training – Companies that see training – particularly for front-line workers – as a critical investment rather than an unwanted cost are more likely to recognize the value of Essential Skills.

Statistically, companies that don't share any of these characteristics are less likely to buy than those that share all four. Unless you have unlimited marketing resources, focus on companies that meet at least two of the four factors.

## Anticipating Employers' Objections

Typically, businesses that are unfamiliar with Essential Skills may express common objections when they begin to explore the tools and applications. Common objections and suggested responses that have proven effective are presented below.

### It costs too much!

- The cost of an Essential Skills test is a small price to pay for ensuring your workers are productive and safe.
- Run a small, specific and measurable pilot first to see how it works.
- Essential Skills tests can be implemented for free by having applicants pay for the assessment.
- Consider how your company would benefit if you could identify and help your higher-risk workers.
- Consider how much your company earnings would increase if you could consistently select people who had the skills to work safely and productively.
- Consider how much hiring the wrong person, or a person who can't be promoted, costs your company now.
- Consider whether your company's profitability is satisfactory.
- Consider that your staff turn-over rate may be costing money.

### **Unions won't buy into it!**

- Essential Skills tests help create safer work environments for union members.
- Some tests (e.g. TOWES) were developed in consultation with unions.
- Unions will support assessments and training that are fair, reliable and effective. Unlike academic tests, Essential Skills assessments measure the specific skills required for the job.
- Essential Skills can be taught. Workers with skill gaps identified through testing can be helped to develop their skills and keep their jobs or move within the company.

### **We don't need it! Everybody here can read!**

- Essential Skills is more than reading. There are varying levels of complexity for each Essential Skill, ranging from level one (lowest) to level five (highest). For example, a person possesses a certain degree of literacy; he or she is not simply literate or illiterate. This concept is applied to all nine Essential Skills.
- Consider whether you are satisfied with your company's safety record.
- Consider whether you are happy with how well workers meet quality standards.

## **What's Hot? Things Employers are Willing to Pay For**

Businesses will pay for products and services that cut costs, increase productivity or generate revenue. Here are some of the Essential Skills products and services that you could promote to business in your region:

- needs analyses;
- assessments;
- creation of employee training programs;
- creation of staff training plans; and,
- enhanced job descriptions based on Essential Skills profiles.

Remember to make the link! For example, an employer might ask you to develop training materials for second language development. Essential Skills such as Reading Text, Writing, Document Use and Oral Communication can be easily linked to this type of training to improve the overall effectiveness of the intervention.

## Key Lessons Learned

### **Dedicate Resources**

Successfully marketing and selling Essential Skills is not an “off the corner of the desk” project. Dedicating resources is vital to your institution’s success in marketing and selling Essential Skills. Assessing employers’ needs and developing customized curriculum is time consuming. It is important to dedicate adequate budgets and sufficient time and human resources to ensure success.

### **Remember the Research**

Employers understand statistics, return on investment and hard data. HRSDC and its international partners have invested millions of dollars researching Essential Skills. Consider that *“a one percent gain in the average literacy/numeracy skill level in Canada would create a permanent increase of \$18.4 billion per year in the country’s GDP.”*<sup>1</sup> What would that growth look like at the level of individual businesses? Use this data to your advantage. (See the resources section of this Guide for more information.)

### **The Power of the Profiles**

The Essential Skills profiles describe how each of the nine Essential Skills is used by workers in more than 230 occupations across Canada. Providing specific work-based tasks and related complexity levels, the profiles form the core of the Essential Skills Research Project conducted by HRSDC, and were frequently identified by participating institutions as the one tool that consistently made sense to business. Become familiar with the structure and range of the profiles – they speak the employer’s language.

### **Go to Business Rather than Invite Business to You**

Busy employers are unlikely to attend Essential Skills information sessions as they often haven’t made the link between the information session and their needs. Most often, businesses see themselves as unique and don’t respond well to a “one size fits all” solution for their very individual problems. Particularly when marketing Essential Skills, it is easier and more effective to go directly to business. Experience shows your target market will not come to you unless you go to them first.

1 Statistics Canada Study (2004)

## **Don't Expect an Easy Sell**

The Essential Skills framework cannot be explained during a 20-second elevator ride. Just as it takes time to explain to employers the concept of Essential Skills and its benefits, employers also need time to digest what they've learned and find applications suitable to their business needs. Essential Skills are often seen as geared towards front line workers, a segment of the workforce that employers may not have previously considered when making large investments in training. Essential Skills are new ideas and many institutions have reported sales cycles of six months or longer. Do not rush the sell – give it time. Remember, the sale will happen on the employer's schedule, not yours.

## **When Employers Get It, they Get It**

Though selling Essential Skills is not easy and the sales cycles are long, experience shows that once an employer sees the value-added link between Essential Skills and their business, they're convinced.

## **Make the Connection**

Employers want to know “what’s in it for me?” It is critical to make the connection between the employers’ needs and how Essential Skills can meet those needs. Research the specific requirements of the companies you meet with and be ready to address concerns about money, time and return on investment. *(For specific suggestions on how to respond to their concerns, see the Marketing and Selling Essential Skills section of this Guide.)*

## **Embed It**

Essential Skills is not a new product but a way to bring new value to the work you are already doing. Rather than selling Essential Skills as a stand-alone solution, it is best to embed it into everything you do. Start by associating any type of training with Essential Skills. For example, when preparing a training proposal or package, use Essential Skills language within the document. Weave Essential Skills into your solution and make the link between Essential Skills and the products and services you are currently selling.

## **Sell a Solution, not a Tool**

The businesses you work with likely face at least one of these issues: safety performance, productivity, quality assurance, regulatory compliance and/or staff recruitment. Instead of “selling” Essential Skills, frame your discussion around these employer issues and how Essential Skills can provide solutions. Employers are not looking to buy new widgets; they are looking to solve their problems.

## **Build on Existing Relationships**

As with all your institution’s business, you will realize more success working with businesses with which you already have a relationship. Cold calls, mail outs and mass e-mailing typically will not generate the response you are looking for. Use your networks and leverage existing successes into new business streams.

### **Want Help?**

For all inquiries, contact the ACCC Essential Skills Team:

- Patrick Merrien, Manager, Essential Skills: pmerrien@acc.ca; 613-746-2222 ext. 3105
- Lucie Brien, Senior Project Officer: lbrien@acc.ca; 613-746-2222 ext. 3124
- Melanie Miller, Administrative Coordinator: mmiller@acc.ca; 613-746-2222 ext. 3117

## Resources

### Research

HRSDC Essential Skills Research Project: <http://srv108.services.gc.ca/english/general/esrp.shtml>

ACCC Essential Skills Webpage: [www.accc.ca/essentialskills](http://www.accc.ca/essentialskills)

ACCC Case Studies: [www.accc.ca/ftp/pubs/studies/200311-EES.pdf](http://www.accc.ca/ftp/pubs/studies/200311-EES.pdf)

Canadian Trucking Human Resources Council (CTHRC): [www.cthrc.com](http://www.cthrc.com)

International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS): [www.hrsdc.gc.ca/en/hip/lld/nls/Surveys/ialscrbk.shtml](http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/en/hip/lld/nls/Surveys/ialscrbk.shtml)

Adult Literacy and Lifeskills Survey (ALLS): [www.hrsdc.gc.ca/en/hip/lld/nls/Surveys/indexsurv.shtml](http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/en/hip/lld/nls/Surveys/indexsurv.shtml)

National Adult Literacy Database (NALD): [www.nald.ca](http://www.nald.ca)

### Profiles

Essential Skills profiles for more than 230 occupations are available for free download from HRSDC web site: [http://srv108.services.gc.ca/english/general/home\\_e.shtml](http://srv108.services.gc.ca/english/general/home_e.shtml)

### Assessment

TOWES (Test of Workplace Essential Skills): [www.towes.ca](http://www.towes.ca)

Measure Up: <http://measureup.towes.com>

### Helpful Documents

*Employer Questions to Determine Specific Foundation Skills Needs*: Institute for the Study of Adult Literacy: [www.ed.psu.edu/isal](http://www.ed.psu.edu/isal)

*Learning at Work: Centre for Education and Work:* [www.cewca.org](http://www.cewca.org)

*Essential Skills Strategy for the Construction Industry:* Construction Sector Council: [www.csc-ca.org](http://www.csc-ca.org)

*Employers' Perspective on Improving Skills for Employment:* National Audit Office: [www.nao.org.uk](http://www.nao.org.uk)

*Business Results Through Literacy:* Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters: [www.cme-mec.ca/on/documents/Literacy\\_Guide\\_CD.pdf](http://www.cme-mec.ca/on/documents/Literacy_Guide_CD.pdf)

*Essential Skills as a Predictor of Safety Performance:* Canadian Trucking Human Resources Council: [www.cthrc.com](http://www.cthrc.com)

*Literacy, Life and Employment, An Analysis of Canadian International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) Microdata:* [www.conferenceboard.ca](http://www.conferenceboard.ca)

*Turning Skills into Profit: Economic Benefits of Workplace Education Programs:* [www.conferenceboard.ca](http://www.conferenceboard.ca)

*Guide to Essential Workplace Skills: The Learning at Work Project:* [www.nald.ca](http://www.nald.ca)

*Essential Workplace Skills: Solutions for the Small Workplace: The Learning at Work Project:* [www.nald.ca](http://www.nald.ca)

*Public Investment in Skills:* C. D. Howe Institute: [www.cdhowe.org](http://www.cdhowe.org)

*Training for the New Economy* (Gordon Betcherman, Kathryn McMullen, Katie Davidman): Canadian Policy Research Networks: [www.cprn.com](http://www.cprn.com)

*Employer Investment in Workplace Learning in Canada: How are we doing, Why it matters, What the key issues are, How we can do better* (Mark Goldenberg): [www.ccl-cca.ca](http://www.ccl-cca.ca)

*Why Train? Calculating the Return on Training Investment:* Open Learning Agency (text version can be found on NALD: [www.nald.ca](http://www.nald.ca))

*Essential Skills and Success in Apprenticeship* (Lynda Fownes and Julian Evetts): [www.nald.ca](http://www.nald.ca)

*Labour Market Information for Your Business: A Guide:* Alberta Human Resources and Employment: [www.alis.gov.ab.ca/pdf/cshop/lmibusiness.pdf](http://www.alis.gov.ab.ca/pdf/cshop/lmibusiness.pdf)