



case study

Chapman's

The proof is in the ice cream

Innovative essential skills training equals results for this food manufacturer

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Increases in essential skills levels have been shown to improve performance and productivity, reduce waste, and improve safety records, impacting bottom line and competitive advantage.

Performance issues are often related to low essential skills levels. Employees with low levels of essential skills have more workplace safety incidents, lower productivity, and higher error rates. Employees with higher levels of essential skills are more productive, adapt better to new or changing situations, and are better prepared for advancement within an organization. Integrating essential skills into an organization's employee development program allows an employer to address many of the underlying skills issues that can affect organizational productivity.

What is Skilling UP?

Skilling UP is an innovative workplace training approach designed to increase the workplace essential skills of employees in the manufacturing sector. The project was funded by the Government of Canada, through the Office of Literacy and Essential Skills (OLES).

Skilling UP offers essential skills training that is tightly tied to workplace procedures and documents determined through the process of an extensive Organizational Needs Assessment. It is aligned to employees' essential skills levels and employers' business goals.

Company goals and challenges

Chapman's is Canada's largest independent ice cream and frozen yogurt manufacturer. The company is family owned and has been operating in a small town in Ontario for more than forty years.

The human resources manager, production and plant managers, and floor supervisors working with the Skilling UP project at the time had three main goals:

1. Reduce paperwork errors, which occur too often, and cost the company time and money.
2. Improve job task planning in a fast-paced and complex job situation.
3. Improve communication or "people skills" when working with different age groups, with seasonal employees, and in high pressure situations. Encourage lead hands to resolve "people issues" more often before passing them on to supervisors.

Forty-five lead hands were divided into two groups for the training, and we ensured that each group represented a mix of skill level and gender, so that employees could be exposed to different viewpoints and perspectives during group discussions.

In terms of the groups' demographics, 71 percent of the training group had a high school education or lower. All the employees reported that they spoke English at home as children.

What we delivered

Nineteen hours of training was developed in response to the time available during a scheduled shutdown at Chapman's. In preparing the customized training, the Skilling UP team visited Chapman's factory, and interviewed management, supervisors, and lead hands to gather information about job tasks and challenges. We also interviewed senior management to find out about Chapman's workplace culture and workforce issues.

The training included small and large group discussions, role playing/simulations, individual work, and brainstorming. Opportunities for questions, discussion, and one-on-one support were built into all activities. The essential skills focused on were:

- Document use
- Job task planning and organizing (time management)
- Communication skills

The results

Many of the lead hands showed substantial skill gains after completing the 19 hours of essential skills training.

This increase in skills means employees require less supervision and make fewer errors in new or unfamiliar situations. They will learn new skills faster and be able to adapt to changes in procedures and technology.

Comments from participants after Skilling UP training:

"This was a great course with good content and trainers. The material content strongly relates to my job."

"I enjoyed this training this week. I found and will find it very useful! It was a great opportunity to hear from other lead hands about how things happen and how it was dealt with – to realize that I'm not alone – a good 'get to know each other time' also."

"Felt better about myself after the course, more motivated to be better."

Comments from company management after Skilling UP training:

"What a great experience! I believe everyone enjoyed themselves."

"The fact that you guys pulled this off so quickly, I can't say enough about the program!"

"I believe this course was excellent, and as we solicit employees from a rural community, where oftentimes in my experience, formal education is not a priority, there is definitely a need to give these individuals baseline skills and a better chance at succession planning."

Contact us

To learn more about Skilling UP training and how we can get results for your company, please contact:

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