

LABOUR MARKET DIALOGUES: MENTORING IN THE WORKPLACE

Labour Market Dialogues is a project of the Community Council designed to explore how employers in BC's Capital Region may be better supported to hire and retain people experiencing barriers to employment. This is one of nine discussion papers that share information on each barrier, with recommendations that could strengthen employers' success in recruiting and retaining staff.

Building on the work of the Quality of Life CHALLENGE Mentorship Task Force, using background research, interviews with key local informants, a literature review and analysis of local mentoring experiences and resources from the business perspective, the project focused on exploring mentoring in the workplace and understanding how local employers view mentoring as a tool for potentially addressing barriers.

Part of the skills shortage solution?

The British Columbia Chamber of Commerce is concerned that while skill shortages have not yet reached a crisis proportion, time is running out for a comprehensive, collective response to this looming problem¹.

Mentoring is one low-cost method of transferring skills and supporting continuous learning throughout all levels of any organization.

Knowledge transfer from one generation of employees to the next is also emerging as a key organizational issue in Canada. With large numbers of employees eligible for retirement soon and a new and younger labour force being hired, businesses must come up with strategies to transfer the corporate memory to their new staff.

The potential of workforce mentoring

In addition to providing an opportunity to learn the job fast, mentoring can be an effective and informal way to orient new hires on the organization's work culture, policies, and "unwritten rules". Mentoring allows employers to provide personalized training, and help employees create professional and career development plans.

There are useful resources available on mentoring. The Canada Public Service Agency for example, offers on-line resources and refers to mentoring as an integral component of their Management Trainee Program².

Participants in this Program are encouraged to benefit from the advice of experienced managers acting as mentors. The Agency promotes mentoring as a supportive learning

relationship, which varies with the personal styles of the partners.

Mentorship: More than just for work

In 2003, BC's Capital Region's Quality of Life CHALLENGE convened a Mentorship Task Force to explore the role of mentoring in moving people out of poverty³. One of the actions emerging out of the Task Force was the creation of "Mentorship Victoria", a small program created in 2005, to raise public awareness of the value of mentoring.

Mentorship Victoria uses a broad definition of mentoring that not only focus on employment needs, but also addresses access to social and professional services, life and family skills development, etc.

Some of the most successful mentoring programs are those that specialize in specific clientele groups, such as the Victoria Immigrant and Refugee Centre Society (VIRCS) and the Inter-Cultural Association of Greater Victoria (ICA), which focus on services for immigrants.

However, there is a need for a mentoring program not only to assist people in poverty in finding a job, but one that also meets the business community's needs for skilled and qualified workers.

Recommendations

Employers could adopt mentoring in the workplace for all new employees, and offer career development incentives or promotions to those who agree to act as mentors to new staff.

Mentorship Victoria could provide a series of mentorship training workshops to meet the

mentoring needs of employment service agencies and employers.

Employers could be supported by the development and distribution of materials to promote and guide workforce mentoring.

Employers could mentor people looking for work through work experience programs.

Employment assistance services could help develop a business case to support government funding of mentoring. Employment assistance service clients could advise on what mentoring services are useful.

More research and piloting of mentoring practices is needed in order to help people

experiencing barriers be hired and be able to retain their new jobs.

¹ Closing the Skills Gap: A Report of the BC Chamber of Commerce. April 2002: http://www.bcchamber.org/files/PDF/Closing_the_Skills_Gap.pdf. <accessed September 26, 2007>.

² http://www.psagency-agencefp.gc.ca/mtp-psg/mentors_e.asp

³ *Mentoring: Options for Action – A Discussion Paper*. December 2004. Quality of Life CHALLENGE

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