

December 2003
Volume 3, Issue 12

“Excellence is an art won by training and habituation. We do not act rightly because we have virtue or excellence, but we rather have those because we have acted rightly. We are what we repeatedly do.

Excellence, then, is not an act but a habit.”

- Aristotle, Philosopher

The Maine Center for Career Preparation is a private, non-profit committed to improving the economic prospects of Maine citizens by improving the linkages between education and workforce development.

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Education Works!

Building Bridges to Work

By Tom Broussard

Why a bridge?

Among many dictionary definitions is the one, “to provide a way across.” Building Bridges programs provide a “way across” for those who want to build linkages between their educational and business communities. But why are bridges necessary?

The global economy is changing the way we work and learn. Education and business have always cooperated, but the symbiotic nature of the relationship has never been so explicit. We have never needed each other so much! It could be said that the speed of change is more the issue than the changes themselves. As such jobs,

companies, businesses and entire industrial sectors are in constant turmoil.

Constant change

When the high school class of 2004 was in 6th grade, a company called Envisionet had 40 employees. In 2001



they had 1200 employees. Today they have already been out of business for two years. When today's seniors were in 6th grade, a company called

BroadcastAmerica.Com had not yet started. Today the 1999 start up once heralded as the world's largest web streaming radio-broadcast, has already been out of business for 3 years. Today, National Semiconductor is coming out of a slump. They were in a slump in the mid-90's from which they emerged in 1998, fell into

again in 1999, and emerged from again in 2000. Where will they be next year? Who knows?

Career preparation demands cooperation

This brings us full circle to the question of why build bridges? The new economy worker needs skills—there is no question about that. But more importantly, the new economy worker needs to be able to accommodate constant change, constant growth and constant learning.

Career Preparation in schools must consider so much more than simply *what* the student may do for work. *How* they will do it is also a central concern. It is entirely possible that there are people who worked for all three of the companies cited above. *What* they did for each company must have changed enormously. But *how* they did it was by being able to accommodate change. Job security today is based on what we know and continue to learn not what we do. Schools and

businesses must work together to create the life long learning ethic that today's work demands.

Maine Learning Results

There is a portion of the Maine Learning Results entitled "Career



Preparation." The Maine Department of Education has been working towards the implementation of Career Preparation. The Building Bridges Program offers one approach to building an understanding of how to implement the Career Prep portion of the Learning Results.

The Building Bridges Program is a valuable *life* prep activity. The reality is that teachers today are afforded very few opportunities to see the world of work in operation.

Yet back at school they are tasked with explaining a world they may never have seen. That doesn't make any sense at all.

Even one plant tour can be meaningful. One tour can provide insight into the world of work that can have an immediate impact on the way a teacher teaches. Multiply those effects by 100 or 1000 or 10,000 teachers each incorporating one new relevant aspect of work into their

curriculum every day and it can make a real difference. And we must make a difference now. The world is changing too quickly for us to take too long to adjust. And there is no end to the adjusting either.

Employee tour guides typically display a huge amount of pride in their work. They explain how people must work together to get a job done. Nothing is accomplished by just one individual anymore.

Teamwork is a given.

Modern workers must manage their own learning. Although a company may provide training opportunities, the individual is responsible for staying on track. Employees are expected to take the initiative.

When asked to identify the most important skills required of workers many employers will stipulate that communications skills, teamwork skills and a desire to do well top the list. Modern manufacturing is often surprisingly dependent on reading and writing skills. Math skills are also in constant demand. Team leaders rotate frequently so individuals can often find themselves in a leadership position on any given project.

As one Building Bridges teacher said, "The plant visit was priceless—everyone—teachers, students and parents—need to see a modern workplace." The Building Bridges Program connects teachers and students directly to the educational needs of business.

The Building Bridges program can help illuminate the difference between *what* you want to do for work and *how* you want to be at work. It relates skill development to jobs; jobs to careers, and work to education. The world of work casts the need for lifelong learning in high relief. The ongoing (and locally observed) process of job creation and job destruction makes the need to maintain one's skills obvious. Student aspirations



are also tied in through the exposure to the ethic of teamwork, improving quality and lifelong learning.

Building Bridges as a tool.

Teachers have a new role to play—helping students learn *how to learn*. Businesses, through programs such as this, can help assure educators that this is what

is needed in the business world.

Businesses can help schools understand what they need regarding skill development and learning in the workplace.

The advocates of career prep are not advocates of one program or another. They are advocates of the *prep* in career prep. Our students need more exposure to *how* to succeed in the world of work than they are getting.

Additional or more advanced classes in English, math, science and languages will not necessarily help today's students to use those tools any

more effectively.

Career prep is the cross cutting theme that is designed not as a class itself but as a tool designed to help other tools be more effective.

Career Prep and programs such as Building Bridges sharpen the saw.