

“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!

Preparing for Success in the Global Economy- High School is just the beginning

By Tom Broussard

In the 1940s and 50s, when our parents were teenagers, a high school education lasted a lifetime. It was all the education that a young man needed to raise a family and get a good job down at the farm, the mill, the shipyard or the waterfront.

Back then, a farmer's son could expect to work the same farm as his father and his grandfather before him. Heck, he even might have been driving the same tractor!



Not Your Father's Tractor

Today's tractor—the computer—is out of date, almost useless, in 18 months, and what's more, the farmer's daughter is more likely to spend her days behind a keyboard than a stove.

Times have changed and so have the rules for success.

In this global economy, the world of work looks very different. Lifelong employment with the same employer is rare.

Downsizing and company closures mean careers are likely to include several different employers and positions. Still, a high school education is all the education that many have. Success in the 21st century demands so much more.

Education Has A Shelf Life

Today's high school graduates have no guarantee of a good job with good pay. What you earn is directly related to what you learn—and today you have to learn constantly. More education yields more income, greater economic security, and a higher quality of life. The shocking truth is that today's high school diplomas are almost obsolete the moment the graduates take off their caps and gowns. While our fathers could depend on their high school diplomas to get them through life, today's high school diploma carries no such guarantees.

Learning How to Learn

Business leaders have repeatedly voiced their concerns regarding the lack of preparedness of today's high school graduates. The Maine Department of Education Learning Results includes (but has not yet funded) career preparation, along with the traditional subjects such as mathematics and social studies, as a critical

"area of learning." In today's global economy, all workers need communication skills, interpersonal skills, decision-making skills and lifelong learning skills.

Learning for Life

Because knowledge is so critical to success in a world of constant change, education must also be constant. Career preparation education which explains this dynamic to all students must be an integral component of primary education. Today it is not.



This problem is not just limited to the public school system either. Seventy-five percent of the workforce of 2020 is already at work. How are these workers going to learn about the new rules? Letting them wait until they are laid off the first time certainly seems

cruel. If dislocation is a predictable feature of modern employment, why pretend otherwise?

After high school, learning is generally available either through the workplace or through some form of continuing education in a college or adult education system. But the individual must recognize the need in order to pursue it.

Similarly, continued education in the workplace is dependent on an employer recognizing the value of an educated workforce.

Training begets training

Let's assume that all employers do recognize the value of an educated workforce. Who gets trained at work?

Department of Labor studies have shown that people who already have considerable training and education are far more likely to receive additional training. People with less education or training are less likely to receive more.

Why is this true?

Although this may sound counterintuitive, the employer's choice of who gets more or less training is not arbitrary. It is based on that employer's assessment of whether the investment in training will pay dividends. Those dividends are defined as contributing to the bottom line—adding profit and value to the company.

Self Direction Prized

A decade ago, the National Center on Education and the Economy reported that the organization of work has changed from a manufacturing structure, where employees were required to be reliable, steady and willing to follow directions, to a “new high performance” structure, where employees are expected to contribute their thinking and initiative to the products and services of the company. If “following directions” was once a highly prized employee characteristic, “create your own instructions and follow them” is now the level of performance employers expect.

When employers state that their workforce needs training or that their applicant pool is unqualified, there is a lot more to that observation than meets the eye. An employer may mean that specific, skill-based training is required of one or more of the company's employees to accomplish a certain task. One person may need to be trained on a new software program while another person might need a writing class, and so on.



However, when an employer expresses the need for more employee training, the discussion of specific, skill-based training can often become a discussion of employee potential.

Who gets more training at work? People with *more potential* get more training. Who gets less training at work? People with *less potential* get less training. In the extreme, this

approaches a point of “No potential?—No training.”

How does a worker improve his potential? Improving performance is so much easier than improving one's potential—one's capacity to learn. The employer wants to improve performance with skills training, but he makes his choice, not based on who needs the training in some absolute sense, but rather based on what an individual can be expected to do with the new knowledge after they receive it.

The absence (or near absence) of basic skills in many employees is what makes an employer decide not to hire or invest further in them. What employers say is lacking in prospective employees are fundamental human skills. These include the ability to be self-motivated, the ability to get along with others, the ability to come to work on time, etc.

Employees need to display sufficient potential to make further investment in them worthwhile. Only then are employers willing to train and invest more. Employers

do not want to invest in what they perceive to be remedial training for employees. Teaching employees to be prompt, to respect their fellow workers, to be honest, to be self-motivated and to be involved is not part of most high schools' curriculums, yet it is these characteristics and skills that are sorely needed in today's workforce.

The competitive world rewards self-direction, yet many people still require it. The modern world demands that you keep up or you will fall behind; you will lose. But the world also says, if you don't keep up, that's OK too. That's the way the system works. There are winners and losers.

So, we have a problem. How do we re-train individuals who are not yet aware of the need to be re-trained? How do we develop potential in people who demonstrate less than is required for businesses to invest in them? How do we help today's high school graduates and current

students to see that the education required to succeed in this century only begins in high school. High school is the beginning, not the end. Our fathers' education is not enough anymore.

If the person with the greatest need is the least likely to receive or pursue additional training, and is further handicapped by being unaware of their need for that training, what then is the action? The reality is that while the first twelve years of formal education might prepare you for your first job, you may only get two weeks notice to prepare



for your next one.

People with fewer skills need more training than people with more skills. But the employer's choice of who to

train is based on employee potential. The decision, then, is based on company need to get the biggest return for its investment. The employer brings the tools to improve performance to the table but the employee must bring the potential to use them. Workers must be self-directed, lifelong learners in order to convince employers to invest in them.

Since change is the only constant in the employment world, career preparation education must directly address improving every student's ability to cope with change. Career preparation must be part of every school's curriculum and every child's education.

High school graduates, the pivotal participants in the world of workforce development who are unaware, uninvolved, uninformed, and, all too often unemployed or underemployed must hear this message.

To be successful in the 21st century, you must become a lifelong learner who *thrives* on change.