

Working to Improve Workers' Communication Skills

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Computers, bits and bytes, information technology, software, spreadsheets! It is difficult to pick up a business publication or newspaper today without some reference to the way that technology and computers have taken over New Jersey's workplace. One might think that simple mastery of computer skills is all that is needed for success today. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Businesses in Monmouth County are finding that among their most pressing staff training need is not computer training, but improved communication skills, especially verbal communication. Companies like Meridian Health Systems, Monmouth Cares and Food Circus have all turned to Brookdale Community College and its ability to access the NJBIA Basic Skills Workforce Training Program funds as a solution.

Now in its fourth year, this unique program has provided training to over 1350 New Jersey businesses and almost 20,000 of their employees since its inception in 2007. The 2010-2011 program is operating with over \$900,000 in funding supplied by the NJ Department of Labor (NJLWD) under the leadership of Commissioner Hal Wirths. "We must make programs available to (businesses) that provide training and the NJ Basic Skills Workforce Program is a shining example of a program that works and has proven results," said Wirths.

Monmouth Cares, a private not for profit, is part of the NJ System of Care for children and families. In that role communication between employees and those they are tasked with helping is paramount. Ms. Chuni Li, Director of HR & Organizational Development praised the fact that Brookdale Community College staff "... put together a customized communication program that covered topics needed for our employees" and that the course "was delivered on our premises, ... with an interactive format".

Food Circus a multi store food chain tapped into the College's expertise to assist their employees improve communication between store workers and their customers. Nancyanne Fama, Assistant Vice President for Human Resources said that "...this could never be replicated by a small family-owned business."

Meridian Health Systems, a major provider of health care services to the Monmouth and Ocean counties has set improved communication skills as a companywide goal for the coming year. The ability of Brookdale Community College to customize the content of its Verbal Communication curriculum to seamlessly fit into the company's training plan has allowed departments across the system to expand professional development to a wider range of personnel than would have been possible without these grant funds.

The training provided under the NJBIA Basic Skills Workforce Training Program is managed by the state's Community College Consortium, but delivered locally by each county college. There is no charge to participate. To learn more call the New Jersey Consortium at 609-393-9000, send an email to info@njworkforce.org, or visit the project web site at www.njworkforce.org/nj_business.html.