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ARE THEY REALLY READY TO WORK? (Full Report) 2006

Employers' Perspectives on the Basic Knowledge and Applied Skills of

New Entrants to the 21st Century U.S. Workforce

Key Findings: Are They Really Ready To Work? (Summary: 2 pages) 2006

[Below are quotes from the full report.]

The survey results indicate that far too many young people are

inadequately prepared to be successful in the workplace. At the high

school level, well over one-half of new entrants are deficiently

prepared in the most important skills -- Oral and Written

Communications, Professionalism/Work Ethic, and Critical

Thinking/Problem Solving.

College graduates are better prepared, with lower levels of

deficiency on the most important skills, but too few are excelling.

Only about one-quarter of four-year college graduates are perceived

to be excellent in many of the most important skills, and more than

one-quarter of four-year college graduates are perceived to be

deficiently prepared in Written Communications.

How can the United States continue to compete in a global economy

if the entering workforce is made up of high school graduates who

lack the skills they need, and of college graduates who are mostly

"adequate" rather than "excellent"?

The four participating organizations jointly surveyed over 400

employers across the United States. These employers articulate the

skill sets that new entrants-recently hired graduates from high

school, two-year colleges or technical schools, and four-year

colleges-need to succeed in the workplace. Among the most important

skills cited by employers:

\*Professionalism/WorkEthic

\*Oral and Written Communications

\*Teamwork/Collaboration and

\*Critical Thinking/Problem Solving.

In fact, the findings indicate that applied skills on all educational

levels trump basic knowledge and skills, such as Reading

Comprehension and Mathematics. In other words, while the "three Rs"

are still fundamental to any new workforce entrant's ability to do

the job, employers emphasize that applied skills like

Teamwork/Collaboration and Critical Thinking are "very important" to

success at work...

Professionalism/WorkEthic,Teamwork/Collaboration and Oral

Communications are rated as the three "most important" applied skills

needed by entrants into today's workforce.

"For high school graduates, the five most frequently reported applied

skills considered "very important" for successful entry level job

performance are: Professionalism/Work Ethic (80%),

Teamwork/Collaboration (75%), Oral Communications (70%),

Ethics/Social Responsibility (63%), and Critical Thinking/Problem

Solving (57%).

[More quotes]

For four-year college graduates, the five most frequently reported

applied skills considered "very important" are: Oral Communications

(95%), Teamwork/Collaboration (94%), Professionalism/Work Ethic

(94%), Written Communications (93%), and Critical Thinking/Problem

Solving (92%).

FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEWS:

"Just making good grades on a test doesn't necessarily make a good

employee. It's the work ethic that makes the difference," notes

Chyrel Fortner, Human Resources Director at Pan Pacific Products, a

small manufacturer in Oklahoma.

[p. 35] ... employer respondents from manufacturing industries were

more likely to report basic knowledge "deficiencies" in Mathematics,

Science, and Reading Comprehension than the employer respondents in

all other industries ...

[p. 36] A substantial majority of employer respondents (70%) report

that Professionalism/Work Ethic among recently hired high school

graduates is "deficient." The majority of the employer respondents

report a lack of Professionalism/Work Ethic, regardless of company

industry, size, or region. Interviewees also support that finding and

stress the importance of this applied skill. "We have experienced

horrendous turnover rates among high school graduates we hire," says

Chyrel Fortner of Pan Pacific Products. "We hire these young people,

and then they don't come to work. And they don't see a problem with

being absent. And when they do come, what they seem to care about is

when they can leave work." ...

THE FUTURE

[p. 50] Nearly three-fourths of respondents (74 percent) expect

Creativity/Innovation to "increase in importance" for future

graduates, placing it in the top five of all skills in this category.

[p. 51] Three-quarters of respondents (76%) rate Make Appropriate

Choices Concerning Health and Wellness, e.g. nutrition, exercise,

stress reduction, work-life effectiveness as an emerging content area

that will be "most critical" for future graduates. In some ways, it

is not surprising that employer respondents consider this to be the

"most critical" emerging content area for future entrants' workforce

readiness. Escalating health care costs are a major concern in many

corporations. ...

[p.52] In addition to health and wellness, the next two most

frequently reported emerging content areas also emphasize personal

responsibility. Over 70% of respondents identify Exercise Personal

Financial Responsibility, e.g., balancing a checkbook, budgeting

skills, retirement planning and Use Entrepreneurial Skills to Enhance

Workplace Productivity and Career Options (70%) as emerging content

areas. Again, both findings may be aligned with a trend of shifting

responsibility from employer to employee.

K-12 AND PARENTS SHOULD PREPARE THE WORKFORCE.

[p.54] Three-quarters of employer respondents say that K-12 schools

should be responsible for providing the necessary basic knowledge and

applied skills for their new entrants. Over two-thirds (68 percent)

say four-year colleges and universities, and 45% select two-year

colleges among their top three choices. Half of the employer

respondents say workforce readiness is the responsibility of the new

entrants themselves.

One of the choices for primary responsibility for making new

entrants work-ready that was not presented on the survey was

"parents." However, that response was written in many times in the

"other" category. Employer respondents' comments indicate that

"parents" are an important part of the equation, and that parents

play a role by instilling in their children the importance of

learning, work, and career. "The schools are handling all that they

can handle. Parents are not pushing the importance of getting a job,

keeping a job. I think the teachers are having a similar problem

motivating kids to stay in school," notes Chyrel Fortner of Pan

Pacific Products, who has worked with local school boards. ...

One final note: It's important to acknowledge that the

educational system serves purposes beyond graduates' preparation for

the workforce. ... This study, reporting on employer perceptions,

focuses only on the readiness of new entrants to the workforce.