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Apprentice Retention in The Skilled Trades



*A Special Labour Force Study Examining
Key Apprentice Retention Factors*

Report Summary



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Government
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ABC etc...

Adult-Based Continuing Education and Training Corporation

Canada

What Apprentices Are Saying...

What makes a good apprentice?

Apprentices said:

- **Patience**
- **Working in the best interest of the company**
- **Keeping busy**
- **Taking initiative**
- **Pride**
- **Dedication**
- **Performance**
- **Personal responsibility**
- **Having diverse skills**
- **Working safely**



What makes a good employer?

Apprentices said:

- **A positive attitude**
- **Respect for apprentices**
- **Mentoring relationships**

When asked to respond to employers who say they can't afford to train, apprentices said:
“How can you afford not to?”

Preamble

- In 1997, The Industry-Education Council of Hamilton (IEC) began an initiative called “**Skilled Trades: Good Careers, Great Futures**”, designed to promote the skilled trades as a viable career option for youth. In 1999, the IEC adopted a secondary focus of **coordinating the community around skilled trades to provide better awareness and access to information and community resources**.

THE CHALLENGE

- In January 2000, an IEC team developed a **skilled trades relationship map** in cooperation with 68 community skilled trades stakeholders. In addition to identifying existing resources and initiatives, the map determined **six key challenges to recruiting more young people into the skilled trades**. One of the challenges identified was “**employer reluctance to train apprentices**”.

THE SOLUTION

- At a **Summit held in March 2000**, over 100 delegates recommended key actions to address the challenges identified by the relationship map. With regard to the challenge of “employer reluctance to train”, the delegates generated a number of key actions, including a listing of employer incentives and access to shared training opportunities. The delegates also recommended the **creation of a human resource strategies tool for small and medium-sized employers**.

THE PLAN

- In September 2000, a working committee of employers made a recommendation that an MBA consulting team be commissioned by the IEC to **study apprentice retention factors**. The study would act as a preliminary step towards the **goal of generating a best practices tool for local employers**. This recommendation was approved by a 30-member Skilled Trades Community Advisory Committee, and the study began in January 2000 through the Sir Wilfrid Laurier MBA Business Consulting Program.
- The study surveyed over **350 apprentices** and was made possible by the support and contributions of The Industry-Education Council of Hamilton, Human Resources Development Canada, ABCetc, the apprentices who participated, Battler Industries, Bennic Machining, Tormont CAT, Dewildt Chrysler, Bob Nelson, the staff and instructors at Mohawk College, and John Norris, Hamilton and District Autobody Repair Association.
- The information contained in this report is a summary of the study “**Apprentice Retention in the Skilled Trades**”, conducted by the Sir Wilfrid Laurier Business Consulting Program. This summary was prepared by the IEC. A copy of the **original 110-page study** is available by contacting the IEC at 905.529.4483.



Quick Stats

- 350 apprentices participated in the apprentice retention study. 37.6% were employed in industrial trades, 17.9% in motive power, and 44.5% in construction trades.
- Employers are concerned about the cost of turnover: This concern is validated by the study: 30% of the apprentices surveyed had already switched employers at least once.
- **Of the apprentices surveyed:**
 - 97.9% were male.
 - 50% were under 25 years of age.
 - 24% belonged to a trade union.
 - 44.3% work for an employer with 10-50 employees.
28.3% work for an employer with less than 10 employees.
 - 53.1% believe that it would be “easy” or “very easy” to get another job in their trade.
 - 78.3% are satisfied with the provincial apprenticeship program.
- **When asked about the level of education completed:**
 - 56.9% completed high school as their highest level of education.
 - 30.7% earned a college diploma as their highest level of education.
 - 4.1% earned a university degree as their highest level of education.
- 67.9% were earning annual salaries in the range of \$20,000 to \$39,000.
60% of respondents felt they were fairly paid by their employer.
- 85.1% expressed satisfaction with their chosen skilled trade career choice, so retention is not related to overall career satisfaction as much as it is related to satisfaction with a specific place of employment.

$$\begin{array}{c} \mathbf{THE\ HR\ EQUATION} \\ \\ \mathbf{+ \quad Hiring\ the\ “right”\ apprentice} \\ \mathbf{+ \quad Retaining\ that\ apprentice} \\ \hline \\ \mathbf{= \quad Increased\ Profits} \\ \mathbf{\quad \quad Increased\ Productivity} \end{array}$$

10 Key Retention Factors

APPRECIATION

LIKING CO-WORKERS

LOYALTY

COMMUNICATION

PRIDE

RESPONSIBILITY

SAFETY

FINANCIAL SUPPORT

ACCESS TO TRAINING

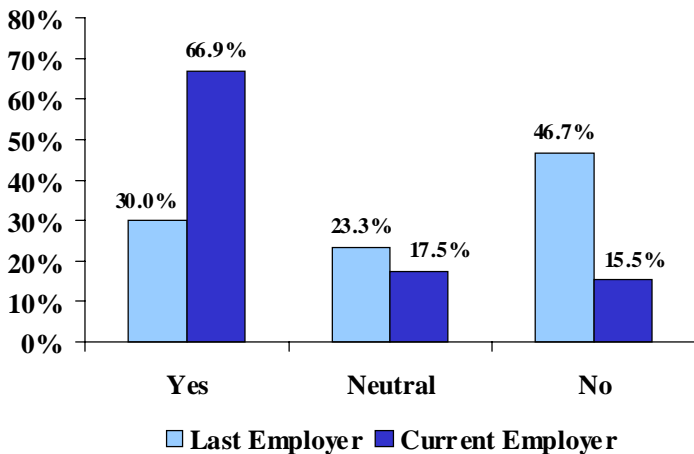
WORK/LIFE BALANCE

APPRECIATION

Apprentices want to be appreciated by their employers.

The apprentices gave a great deal of significance to this aspect of their employment. Employee appreciation and recognition is prevalent in most retention studies, however it permeated almost all aspects of this project. In group discussions apprentices were adamant that the level of appreciation demonstrated by their employer had a significant impact on how the apprentice regarded his/her job.

Survey Questions 15 and 22: Do you feel you have received the recognition and appreciation that you deserved?



46.7% said their last employer did not provide the deserved recognition and appreciation.

By contrast, only 15.5% felt this way about their current employer.

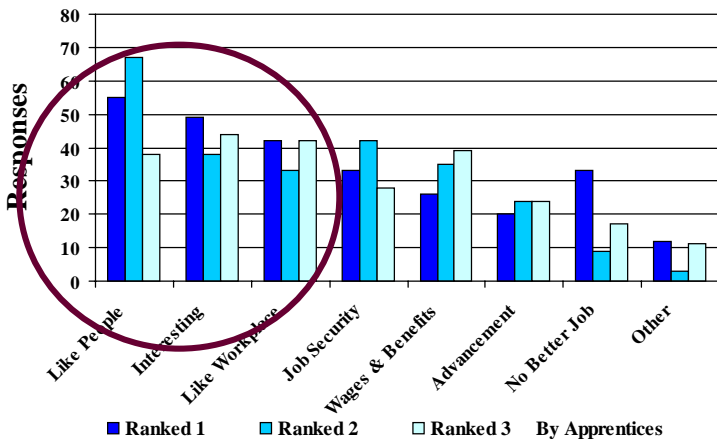
<i>Business Rationale for Appreciation</i>	<i>“Appreciation” Strategies</i>
<p>↑ Retention Lower hiring and training costs</p> <p>↑ Positive Working Environment Increased self-worth and interest in the business</p> <p>↑ Job Satisfaction Increased retention and lower absenteeism rates</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thank apprentices. Don’t underestimate the effect of positive reinforcement. • Implement recognition and team-building events. • Provide creative social or financial incentives. Find out what incentives your apprentice will respond to. • Include your apprentice by keeping him/her informed about the business.

LIKING CO-WORKERS

Over 65% ranked “liking the people they work with” as the number one reason they stay with their employers.

The fact that apprentices want to be employed where they “like the people they work with” in itself is not surprising. What is extraordinary is the level of significance given to this feature of the workplace. Apprentices most frequently indicated the number one reason for staying with their current employer was that they “like the people (they) work with”. Apprentices seemed to put components of a positive working environment above their concern for remuneration - wages and benefits ranked sixth.

Survey Question 27: Rank the top three reasons you have chosen to remain with your current employer.



When asked why they remained with their current employer, the top three answers dealt with a positive working environment.

Wages and benefits were ranked sixth!

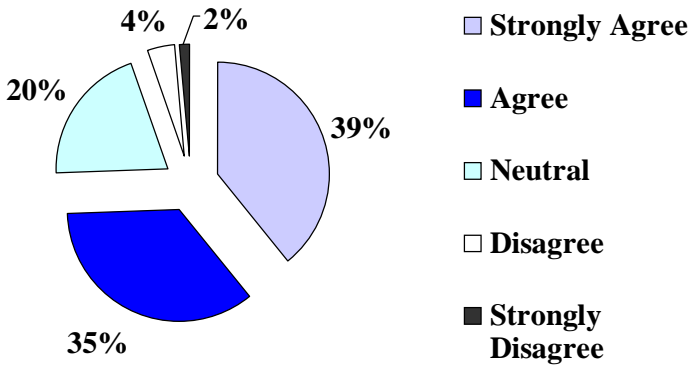
<i>Business Rationale for Liking Co-workers</i>	<i>“Liking Co-workers” Strategies</i>
<p>↑ Retention Liking co-workers is the number one reason apprentices stay with an employer</p> <p>↑ Job Satisfaction Increased self-worth and interest in the business</p> <p>↑ Cohesiveness and Cooperation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make the investment to hire the “right” people. Create a culture that nurtures positive attitudes, pride and co-operation. • Be a role model. Interact with all employees in a positive way. • Create a fun and social environment so that apprentices enjoy coming to work. • Establish work units or teams to further develop co-operation and collaboration.

LOYALTY

74% said loyalty increases with job satisfaction.

This observation appears quite intuitive yet it is still quite important. 74% percent of respondents to Question 30 of the survey agreed that their loyalty to their employer increased with their satisfaction level. Only 6% did not agree. This is important to employers because loyal employees are more likely to stay with the business and market its' merits to potential employees or customers. Apprentices wanted to make a commitment to an employer but that attachment would be based upon their job satisfaction, not a blind obligation to the "boss".

Survey Question 30: Does loyalty increase with job satisfaction?



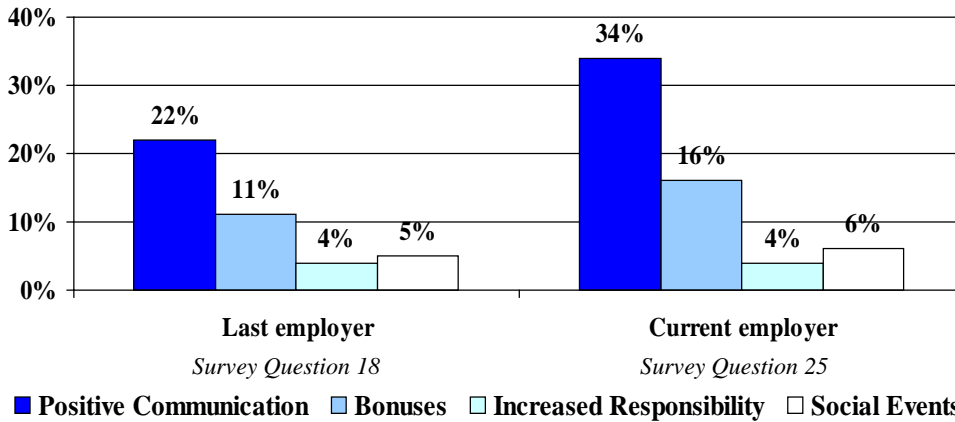
Loyal employees are more likely to stay with the business and market its' merits to potential employees and customers.

<i>Business Rationale for Loyalty</i>	<i>"Loyalty" Strategies</i>
<p>↑ Retention</p> <p>↑ Sales and Competitiveness More likely to market the merits of the business</p> <p>↑ Productivity Less time spent training new employees or waiting to fill positions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be loyal to and supportive of apprentices. It's the best way to encourage them to be loyal to you! • Deliver on your commitments. • Seek out and use feedback from your apprentices. Apprentices will be more loyal to an employer who includes their input in business decisions. • Appreciate and recognize apprentices.

COMMUNICATION

Apprentices see positive, effective and constructive communication as central to good management.

Apprentices were resolute in their desire to be given feedback, but not just when there are problems. They want to have things explained to them in a meaningful way and they want to have input into the scheduling of jobs. The apprentices surveyed believe that better communication will lead to better planning and greater efficiencies. Apprentices do not want to be “mind readers”. They want to know what is going on. A minute’s explanation could save hours of re-work. They do not want to be yelled at or have obscenities directed at them. **Verbal abuse by their employer was one of the most significant complaints by apprentices.**



Appreciation displayed by last employer relative to current employer

<i>Business Rationale for Communication</i>	<i>“Communication” Strategies</i>
<p>↑ Morale Open communication increases confidence</p> <p>↑ Productivity Clear directions and expectations increase apprentice productivity</p> <p>↑ Job Satisfaction By involving and informing employees</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schedule regular opportunities for communication between apprentices and management. • Take the time to clearly explain jobs and answer the apprentice’s questions. • Solicit and act on apprentice suggestions • Inform apprentices about the policies, procedures and goals of the business. • Remember: Verbal abuse can stifle initiative and loyalty.

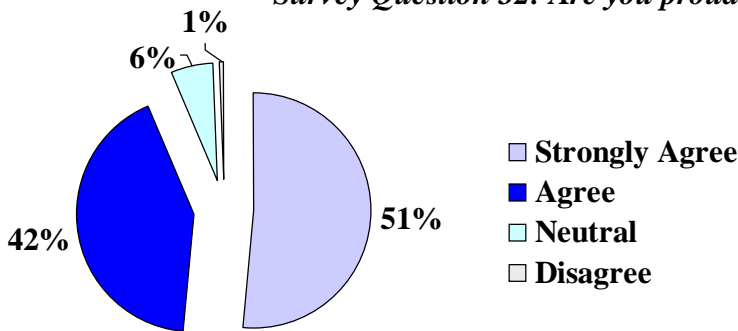
PRIDE

93% of apprentices are proud of the work they do.

Apprentices said that they want to do a good job and not be rushed into doing sloppy or low quality work. **Several apprentices mentioned that they left places of work where the standards were low or where they were encouraged to cut corners.** Conversely, apprentices were attracted to employers that stressed quality work. Apprentices talked about the pleasure they took in showing others (particularly family members) a job they were proud of.

An employers' bottom line should benefit from an employee's desire to take pride in their work. **Increased quality, less re-work, an enhanced reputation and lower levels of supervision** should be a natural result.

Survey Question 32: Are you proud of the work you do?



“I take pride in my work and want to be seen as a professional. My work is my signature. ..I want to get my license so my dad can be proud of me too.”

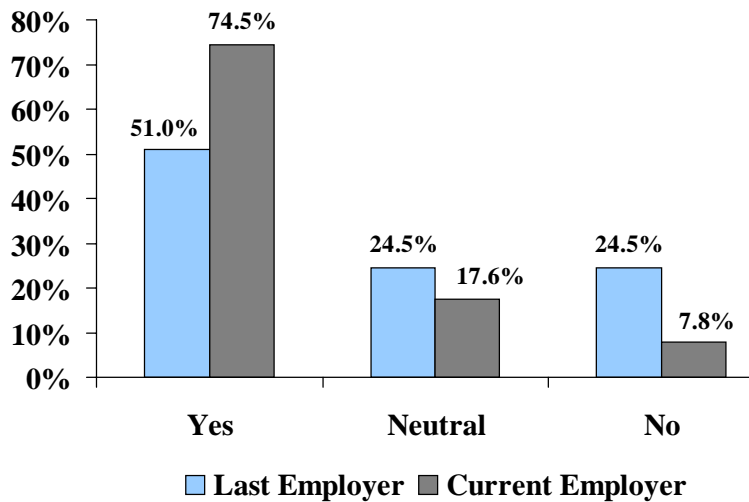
-Truck and coach apprentice

<i>Business Rationale for Pride</i>	<i>“Pride” Strategies</i>
<p>↑ Job Satisfaction Increased pride = increased job satisfaction = increased loyalty</p> <p>↑ Sales and Competitiveness Quality work encourages repeat business</p> <p>↑ Productivity and Financials Reduces re-work and wasted time and materials</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consistently recognize and reward quality work. Make sure all employees know that cutting corners is unacceptable. • Provide appropriate materials, training and time to do the job right. • Provide constructive feedback to apprentices to enhance quality. • Show apprentices how their work contributes to the whole project.

RESPONSIBILITY

Apprentices stay with employers who give them a level of responsibility equal to their ability.

Apprentices stated that they felt frustrated when they were underutilized or that they felt anxiety at having to deal with situations beyond their abilities. Quite often apprentices spoke of working within systems that did not account for individual differences in learning styles, physical abilities, or personal situations. Apprentices also spoke of being passed-over for promotions or assignments because employers decided to place one of their family members or a more senior employee in a position even though the apprentice was the most skilled. **This action almost always resulted in the apprentice deciding to leave the employer.**



Survey Questions 16 and 23:

Do you feel you have been given responsibilities equal to your abilities?

<i>Business Rationale for Responsibility</i>	<i>“Responsibility” Strategies</i>
<p>↑ Job Satisfaction</p> <p>↑ Self-worth of apprentices Using an apprentice’s abilities appropriately increases self-worth and commitment</p> <p>↑ Productivity Matching skills to jobs that need to be completed leads to faster turnaround times</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct regular performance reviews and adjust the level of responsibility accordingly. This will increase the overall skill base of the company. • Match responsibility to ability. Over or underestimating ability = dissatisfaction. • Offer new challenges and vary the routine of the job. This ensures that apprentices stay interested in the work.

SAFETY

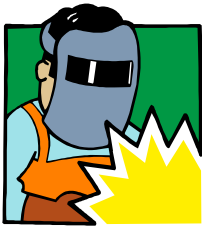
Apprentices want to work in a safe environment and produce products and services that are not harmful to the consumer.

Unsafe conditions cause apprentices to leave their employers

During the group discussions, apprentices felt that health and safety are at times the “most” important elements in their decision to leave a place of work. Comments from apprentices ranged from problems with ventilation systems and the lack of safety training to situations that could lead to serious injury or death.

The apprentices said that they often felt rushed and that this “hurry-up mentality” led to accidents on the job and undermined their confidence in the quality and safety of their work. Apprentices talked about being directed to meet the bare minimum of safety standards and about inspectors that were too busy to properly inspect finished projects.

Apprentices Value a Healthy and Safe Workplace



Apprentices understand the critical role of health and safety in their jobs. An attempt to save money by cutting corners could lead to serious consequences for an apprentice who often depends on his/her physical ability to make a living.

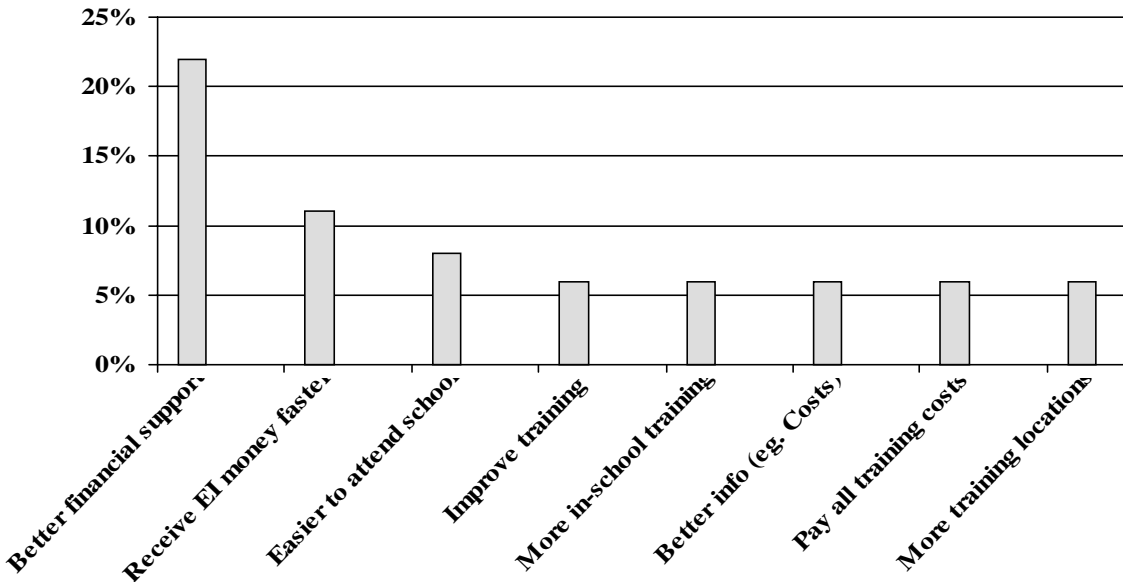
<i>Business Rationale for Safety</i>	<i>“Safety” Strategies</i>
↑ Retention Safe conditions attract and retain apprentices	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Develop a “safety first” policy. Apprentices need to know that workplace and product safety are taken seriously.• Educate and train employees on health and safety issues.• Be a role model for safe practices.• Appoint a health and safety officer or team to review and introduce policies.• Encourage employees to behave as if a safety inspector were on-site every day.
↑ Safety Increased workplace safety and product safety reduces re-work and legal costs	
↑ Productivity Ensuring safety increases productivity and reduces time spent addressing safety concerns	

FINANCIAL SUPPORT

The apprentices in the group discussions realize that they are in an enviable financial situation compared to many people taking post-secondary training.

The apprentices see difficulties tied to the “administrative nightmare” of trying to co-ordinate the flow of information from their employer to the “apprenticeship office”, then to the college, and then to Human Resources Development Canada. A number of individuals described the process as confusing and distracting. Apprentices would like to receive better financial support and E.I. money faster.

Survey Question 40: What changes would you make to the apprenticeship program to make it more attractive to remain in?



<i>Business Rationale for Financial Support</i>	<i>“Financial Support” Strategies</i>
<p>↑ Loyalty Apprentices will appreciate your efforts to make the process of receiving financial support easier</p> <p>↑ Productivity Cutting down on distractions and financial concerns will increase productivity</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make sure that the paperwork is completed well in advance of the apprentice going to school. • Explain the rules and practices for attending school. • Reduce interruptions in pay when the apprentice returns from school. • Get involved in petitioning government for increased subsidies for apprentices.

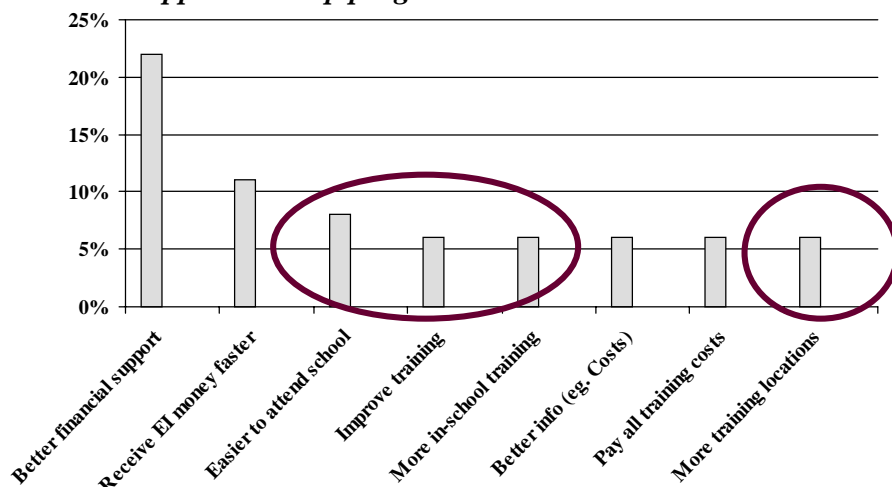
ACCESS TO TRAINING

Apprentices want better access to apprenticeship training.

Apprentices remarked on the shortage of training facilities, the fact that some of the instructors were using old industry information, the course material wasn't diversified enough, and that the provincial requirements for licensing did not align with the requirements of the workplace.

Many apprentices complained about not receiving adequate training on the job, in some instances only being allowed to perform certain techniques at school, and never on the job. Some apprentices complained that they had to argue and fight to get into school because their employer wanted to keep them working.

Survey Questions 40: What changes would you make to the apprenticeship program to make it more attractive to remain in it?



<i>Business Rationale for Access to Training</i>	<i>“Access to Training” Strategies</i>
<p>↑ Skill Base and Quality Well-trained employees make the company sustainable by making it attractive to potential employees and customers</p> <p>↑ Confidence and Job Satisfaction Ensuring high quality and a broad range of training increases confidence and satisfaction</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give apprentices access to a broad range of training opportunities. • Find out what apprentices are learning in school, and match on-the-job training to the skills acquired in class. • Allow and broker access to outside training opportunities if you cannot provide training in all the required areas. • Avoid repetitive tasks for apprentices.

WORK/LIFE BALANCE

Apprentices want to work for an employer who recognizes and allows employees to have a life outside of the workplace.

As reflected in group discussions, apprentices recognize that sometimes they must work long hours in uncomfortable working conditions or they may have to travel long distances to a work site. These are regarded as aspects of the job. However, apprentices said they resent being treated as an extension of a machine or as part of a project instead of a person with a family and personal interests outside those of the company.

The need for a proper life/work balance was a common consideration of participants in the group discussions. Ideal employers were described as those organizing their human resources strategy with consideration to their employee's personal needs.



<i>Business Rationale for Work/Life Balance</i>	<i>“Work/Life Balance” Strategies</i>
<p>↑ Workplace Culture Apprentices will feel appreciated as human beings, not just as employees</p> <p>↑ Productivity and Employee Health Employees with a healthy work/life balance are more productive and have lower absenteeism rates.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Allow apprentices time to attend to their personal life needs.• Plan the workday to maximize efficiency and avoid wasted time.• Do provide health and dental benefits.• Start a pension plan to encourage apprentices to stay long-term.• Plan social events that include apprentices’ families.

Retention Checklist

APPRECIATION

- Thank apprentices. Don't underestimate the effect of positive reinforcement.
- Implement recognition and team-building events.
- Provide creative social or financial incentives. Find out what incentives your apprentice will respond to.
- Include your apprentice by keeping him/her informed about the business

LIKING CO-WORKERS

- Make the investment to hire the "right" people. Create a culture that nurtures positive attitudes, pride and co-operation.
- Be a role model. Interact with all employees in a positive way.
- Create a fun and social environment so that apprentices enjoy coming to work.
- Establish work units or teams to further develop co-operation and collaboration. Nurture loyalty by keeping apprentices informed about the business and involved in the operations and scheduling of jobs.

LOYALTY

- Be loyal to and supportive of apprentices. It's the best way to encourage them to be loyal to you!
- Deliver on your commitments.
- Seek out and use feedback from your apprentices. Apprentices will be more loyal to an employer who includes their input in business decisions.
- Appreciate and recognize apprentices.

COMMUNICATION

- Schedule regular opportunities for communication between apprentices and management.
- Take the time to clearly explain jobs and answer the apprentice's questions.
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- Remember: Verbal abuse can stifle initiative and loyalty.

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- Consistently recognize and reward quality work. Make sure all employees know that cutting corners is unacceptable.
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- Provide constructive feedback to apprentices to enhance quality.
- Show apprentices how their work contributes to the whole project.

Retention Checklist Continued...

RESPONSIBILITY

- Conduct regular performance reviews and adjust the level of responsibility accordingly. This will increase the overall skill base of the company.
- Match responsibility to ability. Over or underestimating ability = dissatisfaction.
- Offer new challenges and vary the routine of the job. This ensures that apprentices stay interested in the work.

SAFETY

- Develop a “safety first” policy. Apprentices need to know that workplace and product safety are taken seriously.
- Educate and train employees on health and safety issues.
- Be a role model for safe practices.
- Appoint a health and safety officer or team to review and introduce policies.
- Encourage employees to behave as if a safety inspector were on-site every day.

FINANCIAL SUPPORT

- Make sure that the paperwork is completed well in advance of the apprentice going to school.
- Explain the rules and practices for attending school.
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