

■ **WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT**

Growth through education benefits even entry-level workers

Benjamin Franklin once said “an investment in knowledge pays the best interest.” In business, you probably think of investing in knowledge as continuing education, retraining or advanced skill development for technical and business expertise. Simply put, you have a need to continue to refine and enhance the abilities of your educated workforce to stay viable in today’s competitive market.

While this concept is accurate, it fails to give attention to one of the most crucial areas of your business: undereducated employees.

Today, the U.S. workforce features a wide variety of education levels, but most



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people may not realize just how many employed Americans fall in the “undereducated” category. A 2011 report said 18 percent of the current U.S. workforce, or 39,769,125 people, do not have a high school diploma or GED. Nearly 140,000 of these adults reside in Idaho. According to the American

Council on Education, nearly half (48.8 percent) of these people work for a small business with 20 employees or fewer.

In business, less education typically equates to entry-level jobs with menial duties and low-wage benefits. However, when you consider that this group can make up 30 percent or more of your company’s overall workforce, and is often directly communicating with your customers, you may want to study the impact of your allocations. These entry-level workers are prime candidates to be overlooked and undervalued when thinking about the overall growth of your company.

This demographic is an

important part of the workforce and can be extremely impactful if developed effectively. For example, what better way to increase morale, promote loyalty and establish a shared commitment than by helping your employees position themselves to advance within the organization? Lack of movement for employees can lead to discontent, decreased productivity, poor customer service and high turnover.

By investing in the undereducated workforce, you have the opportunity to increase the general skills and critical thinking of workers, leading to an improved pool of employees. In addition, the push toward a more edu-

cated workforce can lead to these workers excelling within the company as they go beyond the GED to post-secondary education.

Providing continuing education benefits also promotes a sense of value for employees while helping to improve their lives, and makes them feel more in tune with the organization as a whole.

The financial investment it takes to complete the GED is minimal, but the reward can be invaluable.

The current GED comprises five tests that cost a mere \$20 each. In January 2014, when the GED becomes electronic, the total cost will still be affordable at \$120. Additionally, your local

community college offers free classes in basic English, math, reading and English as a second language to help prepare your workforce for the GED test and help ensure opportunities for success.

In summary, a smart employer will recognize that business success is reliant upon a strong foundation of knowledgeable employees. Do not overlook your ability to build your business through an employee skills-enhancement program. Resources are available, the financial investment is low, and the rewards for training entry-level staff can be great.

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