



Oct. 3, 2017

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Jay Smith, Express Employment Professionals, 662-5187 or Jay.Smith@expresspros.com; Steve Maher, Our Valley Our Future project coordinator, 630-2090 or info@ourvalleyourfuture.org.

Local employers struggling to find qualified applicants, survey finds

Our Valley report recommends teaching of 'soft' workforce skills be added to classrooms

WENATCHEE — Local employers are finding it difficult to fill jobs, in large part due to the lack of basic skills exhibited by applicants in such areas as work habits and communication, according to an Our Valley, Our Future workforce needs assessment report.

The Our Valley report recommends collaborative public and private partnerships be established and the teaching of workforce skills be incorporated into existing classroom coursework.

The report, based on a survey of 27 employers in the region, was compiled by a team of local human resource officials representing 11 public agencies, businesses and educational institutions. The lead partner was Express Employment Professionals.

The Our Valley, Our Future action item called for the team to discover the workforce needs of local employers and to recommend ways school districts and higher education institutions can develop programs that will educate and train students to meet those needs.

“The results of this workplace needs assessment give clear voice to and acknowledgement of what employers are saying: There is an urgent need to increase employability skills in our current workforce,” the Our Valley report states. “It has to start here, it has to start now and it has to start with us, joining public and private resources to better equip our workforce with the skills they need to succeed that will allow the businesses in Our Valley to flourish.”

In the survey, employers reported many applicants, as well as youth, lack ‘soft skills,’ an umbrella term covering communication and interpersonal skills, emotional intelligence, leadership qualities, team skills, negotiation skills, time and stress management, and business etiquette.

The report did not take a look at look at job-specific skills — also known as ‘hard skills.’

Soft skills are considered necessary in the workplace for professional success and for an organization to function smoothly and productively.

The 27 local employers who responded to the survey included four employers with 500 to 1,000 employees; 17 employers with 50 to 500 employees; and six employers with 50 or less employees.

Among the survey findings:

- 59 percent of employers indicated “some difficulty” hiring qualified applicants in the last 12 months.
- 30 percent of employers indicated “significant difficulty” hiring qualified applicants in the last 12 months.
- 81 percent reported “moderate to high difficulty” with poor communication skills in applicants or new hires.
- 78 percent reported “moderate to high difficulty” with poor work habits in applicants or new hires.
- 70 percent reported “moderate to high difficulty” with job-specific/occupational skills in applicants or new hires.

The findings in the report mirror state and national trends. Employers are clamoring for workers who have soft skills. The Indiana Business Research Center has found that while credentials (degrees and certifications) are important, it is the development of soft skills that is critical to developing a strong, vibrant workforce.

The report applauds local workforce and education programs but says more collaborative local partnerships are needed to connect educational institutions with regional employers.

“Career Fairs are very helpful events, but attendance is optional and a large portion of our upcoming workforce is slipping through the cracks,” the report states. “Recommendations might include incorporating local employers as guest speakers into current educational curriculum, increasing the messaging of employability skills and workplace expectations. Writing classes could include job applications and resume writing workshops.

“Our educational institutions are already asked to do a great deal with very limited resources, so any recommendation would need to be respectfully approached, and integrated with existing coursework. Additional programs that might be considered could be requiring community service hours in lieu of senior projects, work-based-learning opportunities for class credit or promoting trade work exposure through skilled trade class opportunities.”

For the entire report, visit www.ourvalleyourfuture.org.

In addition to Express Employment Professionals’ Jay Smith and Debbie Smith, those involved in producing the report included Douglas County PUD’s Barbara Davis, Chelan County PUD’s Mario Cantu and Lorna Klemanski, Port of Douglas County’s Ron Cridlebaugh, Port of Chelan County’s Craig Larsen, SkillSource’s Dave Petersen and Wendy Fishburne, WorkSource Wenatchee’s Maria Maravilla, OIC of Washington’s Lupe Sanchez, Wenatchee School District’s Dennis Conger, Wenatchee Learns Connect’s Diana Haglund, Wenatchee Valley College’s Reagan Bellamy, and Washington State University’s Gene Sharratt.

The Workforce Needs Assessment action item is one of 149 action items, along with seven major game-changer projects, that make up the Our Valley, Our Future Action Plan, released in November 2016. All the plan’s projects were identified by residents as ones that will improve their quality of life, build resiliency in the face of change, and shape the community’s future.

###