



Left to right: Greg Davis with OC Transpo staffers Ruth Manion, Luqman Shah and Ken Strandholt.

WORKPLACE EDUCATION: A WIN-WIN PROPOSITION

Workplace education programs reap benefits for employers as well as workers. Organizations that encourage employees to improve their skills are motivating them to succeed in the workplace.

MARAL MACLAGAN looks at how the City of Ottawa uses distance education courses from TVOntario's Independent Learning Centre (ILC) to support employee success.

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When changes to educational requirements for certain positions came into effect, the City of Ottawa realized that it needed to help its employees meet the new standards. “It benefits the individuals and the organization when employees increase their skill level,” explains Bill Holmes who helped set up the city’s program. He points out that developing and promoting internal employees also ensures effective leadership in the organization.

As the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board’s on-site workplace education liaison, Greg Davis helps guide employees to the educational options that suit them best. An experienced adult education and literacy teacher, she estimates that in the last three years, approximately 70 city employees have earned their diplomas with the help of the ILC. She has seen some remarkable transformations.

The flexibility of ILC courses is a large plus for most employees, whose diverse schedules or job sites make taking formal classes impossible. “People can work at their own pace,” Greg explains. For example, at OC Transpo (the city’s public transit system), Greg says “I see many bus operators who work split shifts: 6–9 am and then 3–7 pm. For them, day or night classes are just not an option, especially as most of them have families too.”

FINDING HELP ONE STEP AT A TIME

At any given time, Greg may be working with 40 to 60 employees. Most of them are studying to comply with new provincial legislation or to qualify for promotion. “Many just never had the chance when they were younger, or it was always something they wanted to do.” Whatever the reason, Greg is there to make the transition to learning a smooth one.

To help students succeed, “coaching is critical,” Greg stresses. She offers confidential, one-on-one assistance, checking in with students to help them through the first few lessons. She also has students bring completed assignments to her, which she then mails to the ILC for marking. When the work is returned, she asks the students to pick it up in person. “This brings them in the door, so I can keep tabs on their progress.” When

employees successfully complete ILC courses, Greg is there to help them apply for promotions that had previously been out of their reach. She also arranges for co-op placements and ensures employees take courses that will qualify them for apprenticeships.

MOVIN’ ON UP

Greg helped bus operator Luqman Shah, who immigrated to Canada from Guyana. He had been working for OC Transpo for over 10 years when he decided to complete Grade 12. “I knew that getting my diploma was the key to moving up in the organization,” he says. It took him two years to earn the four credits he needed through the ILC. “This is a big accomplishment in my life,” Luqman stresses, proud that he can now apply for positions that he did not qualify for previously.

Ken Strandholt, another bus operator, always regretted not finishing school. With Greg’s support, Ken finally earned his diploma, nearly 15 years after starting his first ILC course. He studied during breaks in his shifts and in rare moments between raising three children of his own and running a foster agency for special needs children from his home. Since graduating, he has made the short list of applicants for a supervisor position. Ken is eager to make a greater contribution to OC Transpo.

Greg also counsels spouses and children of employees who want to complete their education with the ILC, such as Ruth Manion, wife of a long-time city employee. Without her Grade 12 diploma, Ruth was unqualified for a job as an OC Transpo bus operator. She had four credits to earn, which takes most students over two years, but a determined Ruth earned them through the ILC in just 11 months. “I was lucky to have support from my family and the ILC,” says Ruth. She has been working as a bus operator since January 2003, and her success with ILC courses has given her the confidence to hit the books again.

CONFIDENCE BOOSTER

Greg also assisted a number of the city’s water and wastewater operators in upgrading their education, since Grade 12 or the equivalent is now needed to write their mandatory provincial exam. Caroline Holt-Smith, who works in Human

Resources for Ottawa’s Public Works and Services, Utility Services Branch, has been amazed by the outcomes. “The benefits go beyond the fact that these employees need the piece of paper,” she explains. “I have seen a room of 20 men who were terrified by the thought of having to return to studying, turn into self-confident, goal-oriented individuals.” Many employees also told her that their relationships with their children became closer because they supported each other while studying. Caroline also attributes the program’s success to senior management, who believe strongly in investing in their most valuable asset – their employees.

Greg recognizes that achieving educational goals gives employees not only a professional advantage, but a personal boost as well. “People feel so proud of themselves when they complete courses, and their self-esteem goes way up,” says Greg. “It’s all about allowing people to feel that they have possibilities.”



IT’S ALL A CLICK AWAY!

Learners of all ages can find information on Independent Learning Centre courses, homework help and post-secondary choices at www.ilc.org.

- **COURSES**
Ontario Ministry of Education high school credit courses and elementary programs by correspondence
- **CAREERMATTERS**
A guide to high school, career profiles, and post-secondary planning
- **ASK A TEACHER**
Free online homework help with certified Ontario teachers
- **GED**
Testing for the Ontario High School Equivalency Certificate

For more information, visit www.ilc.org or call 416.484.2704 in the GTA or 1.800.387.5512.