Employability or “Soft” Skills: Background and Resources

During the Bridging the Skills Gap research, the stakeholders identified the need for soft skills development in a community-focused workforce strategy. Soft skills are vitally important in the work place. Another term used for soft skills is employability skills. Research and resources are abundant for organizations seeking to build capacity in this area.

Background

Research, dating back to the turn of the last century, showed that success at work was 85% soft skills and 15% hard skills. (Mann, Charles, A Study of Engineering Education, 1918). “It may be hard to believe that nearly 100 years have passed since this was documented, yet very little has changed. The fact that the need for soft skills education in schools and workplaces is an on-going issue was the spark that helped create the National Soft Skills Association.”, http://www.nationalsoftskills.org/

85% of job success comes from having well-developed soft skills and people skills, and only 15% of job success comes from technical skills and knowledge (hard skills).

http://www.nationalsoftskills.org/

A recent survey by CareerBuilder still supports the importance soft skills. Their research identified the top ten soft skills companies look for when hiring. Those skills were:

1) Candidate has a strong work ethic – 73 percent
2) Candidate is dependable – 73 percent
3) Candidate has a positive attitude – 72 percent
4) Candidate is self-motivated – 66 percent
5) Candidate is team-oriented – 60 percent
6) Candidate is organized, can manage multiple priorities – 57 percent
7) Candidate works well under pressure – 57 percent
8) Candidate is an effective communicator – 56 percent
9) Candidate is flexible – 51 percent
10) Candidate is confident – 46 percent


The Office of Career, Technical and Adult Education in The U.S. Department of Education is a valuable resource for anyone wanting to learn more about this area. They have developed an Employability Skills Framework, http://cte.ed.gov/employabilityskills/. This website provides many different types of resources including a checklist that employers can use to assess interviewees.

**Resources for Soft Skills Development in Rural Communities**

The need for soft skills/employability skills development must be collectively identified by community stakeholders before being addressed as a community issue. Once soft skills development is recognized as a need, there are several approaches that can be used to address it. A few examples are shared below:

**K-12 and Soft Skills Development**

Hanover Research has worked in this area and their insights can be found at: http://www.hanoverresearch.com/insights/the-soft-skills-that-matter-and-how-to-incorporate-them-into-k-12-curriculum/?i=k-12-education Taking this approach will require direct cooperation with both the school administration and teachers.

“Skills to Pay the Bills: Mastering Soft Skills for Workplace Success,” is a curriculum developed by ODEP focused on teaching “soft” or workforce readiness skills to youth, including youth with disabilities. Created for youth development professionals as an introduction to workplace interpersonal and professional skills, the curriculum is targeted for youth ages 14 to 21 in both in-school and out-of-school environments. The basic structure of the program is comprised of modular, hands-on, engaging activities that focus on six key skill areas: communication, enthusiasm and attitude, teamwork, networking, problem solving and critical thinking, and professionalism.”

https://www.dol.gov/odep/topics/youth/softskills/

**Beyond K-12**

Soft skills development can also be incorporated into a mentoring program as shown at: https://www.trainingindustry.com/blog/blog-entries/mentoring-millennials-to-teach-hard-to-come-by-soft-skills.aspx

The North Carolina Network for Excellence in Teaching developed a toolkit that could be used in a community setting. More information can be found at: http://www.nc-net.info/employability.php

“Tackling the Tough Skills: A Curriculum Building Skill for Work and Life” was developed by Missouri Extension to increase employability skills. It can be found at: http://extension.missouri.edu/tough-life-skills/