

CAN SOFT SKILLS TRAINING SURVIVE TOUGH TIMES?

Examining the value and viability of job readiness training in today's economy



As members of the workforce development profession, you are facing a seemingly insurmountable number of challenges in today's economy. The sheer number of people coming through your doors is increasing at an overwhelming rate. Federal funding is being slashed more and more every year. And now, on top of being faced with the challenge of serving more people with less money, you are under increased scrutiny to prove that all your career interventions are effective, both in terms of skills gains and cost-effectiveness.

Training for training's sake is no longer an option. To continue providing employability soft skills training in the new economy, you will need to develop new and creative training initiatives that demonstrate top ROI.

HOW IMPORTANT ARE SOFT SKILLS, ANYWAY?

Many of the customers in need of employment assistance programs do not have the fundamental soft skills needed to succeed in the workforce. Although these social skills are not taught in school, they are key to successful career interventions.

Research has shown that employers consider soft skills to be equally indicative of a candidate's abilities as traditional job requirements. During a job interview, for example, employers will evaluate everything from a person's handshake and timeliness to their attitude and overall behavior.

Soft skills not only help people get jobs, they help people keep jobs. Lack of employability soft skills is a major cause of job loss among customers, particularly for hard-to-serve populations and young people who have never before held jobs.

Job seekers are not the only ones struggling in today's economy; employers are feeling the hit as well. Meeting the demands of employers to provide work ready job applicants, with critical soft skills, is a essential piece of the puzzle.

Today more than ever, with unemployment high and only one job opening for every four to five people looking for work, soft skills can make or break a candidate's chances of being hired.



Providing the services necessary to help customers find, get, and keep jobs is no easy task. The challenges today seem almost insurmountable. Here are some of the most daunting issues:

- States Will Have Less TANF Funding In FY 2011 Than in FY 2009-FY 2010**
- Decreases in TANF funding for FY2011
- 20% or greater ■ 15-19% ■ 10-14% ■ 5-9% ■ less than 5%
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- The map displays the following distribution of funding decrease categories by state:
- 20% or greater (Dark Red):** TX, LA, AL.
 - 15-19% (Orange):** WA, OR, CA, NV, UT, CO, NM, AZ, MT, ND, SD, NE, KS, MO, AR, MS, TN, KY, OH, WV, VA, NC, SC, GA, FL, NY, NJ, DE, MD, DC.
 - 10-14% (Yellow):** ID, WY, OK, IA, IL, IN, MI, WI, MN, ME, MA, RI, CT.
 - 5-9% (Light Orange):** VT, NH.
 - less than 5% (White):** AK, HI.
- Source: CBPP analysis.
- Center on Budget and Policy Priorities | cbpp.org

- **Customer Diversity:** Years ago, the majority of customers had very similar demographics. Today, customers are entering the system with a much broader range of skills and barriers. People who have never before struggled with employment are struggling now.

- **Employment Barriers:** Many customers are faced with a wide range of challenges, including emotional and mental health issues; literacy problems; lack of motivation; poor self-esteem; negative attitudes; drug and alcohol addictions; prison backgrounds; and variety of disabilities. Working with these hard-to-serve populations makes it extremely difficult for workforce centers to provide successful and cost-effective career interventions.
- **Increased Scrutiny:** Workforce centers are entering a time where they need to evaluate every intervention and training they provide to ensure that each one is measurable and effective—both in terms of skill gain for the customer and cost effectiveness for the centers.

THE CASE FOR TECHNOLOGY

Technology-based training solutions can help ease caseloads, stretch dollars, and improve outcomes. Here are some key benefits of online training:

- **Efficient process:** Learners can work on their own schedule, at their own pace, as often as needed. Online training frees up time and resources so that case managers and staff can focus on more personalized intervention needs.
- **Effective model:** Good online training incorporates video and graphics to accommodate multiple learning styles, regardless of literacy skills.
- **Consistent curriculum:** Online programs allow workforce centers to provide training that is the same across multiple training locations.
- **Non-judgmental setting:** Outside the traditional classroom setting, learners can take as long as they need to understand the lessons, without the fear of embarrassment or judgment.
- **Crucial cross training:** When online training is used to teach employability skills, customers simultaneously learn technology skills. Because there are very few jobs today that do not use technology in the workplace, it is essential for job seekers to have a basic familiarity and comfort with technology.

Studies show that good online training can be 50% more efficient, 60% more effective, and 70% faster than traditional classroom training.



WinAt-Work: AN ONLINE TRAINING MODEL WITH ADDED VALUE

Because workforce development professionals serve such a diverse demographic of job seekers, with skills and barriers that span the spectrum, human interaction can never be eliminated completely—nor should it. Indeed, technology-based training is at its best when it can set up and prepare learners for more effective and efficient human interactions.

The Quality Group's (TQG) WinAt-Work employability skills training solution does just that. With a long history dating back to the late 1980s, WinAt-Work has been used by hundreds of organizations, in hundreds of scenarios, providing thousands and thousands of customers with the soft skills, motivation, and confidence they need to succeed at work—and in life.

WinAt-Work is a time-tested and newly modernized program that increases the overall benefits of technology-based training in the following ways:

- **Innovative Instructional Design:** WinAt-Work incorporates gaming, simulation, and interactive engagement features into its e-Learning model. Customers build self-esteem and take personal responsibility by making real-time decisions, getting feedback, taking quizzes, navigating simulations, and experiencing consequences. The lessons show job seekers, through modeling behavior, the best way to handle a variety of relevant situations. Customers make the decisions and see immediate consequences of their choices.
- **Superior Training Modules:** WinAt-Work delivers information in small chunks, allowing learners to easily split their time between multiple activities and feel a sense of accomplishment. Newly modernized workplace video scenarios are relevant, engaging, and entertaining. The program consists of eight hours of online training, broken down into four modules: Interviewing; Good Work Habits; Getting Along; and Getting Ahead.



- **Easy Access:** 100% web-based, the WinAt-Work program is easy-to-use, intuitive, and accessible to customers at a workforce center, on a home computer, at the library, or anywhere else with Internet access.
- **Comprehensive Management and Reporting:** WinAt-Work is powered by TQG's OpusWorks® platform, which provides a complete management and reporting system. Easy to use tracking and reporting capabilities give centers a consistent way to measure the skill gains of their customers. Automated reporting makes it easier for centers to document gains, make program improvements, and better compete for funding with evidence-based data. Pre- and post-testing data is automatically collected, making it fast and easy to quantify training results.
- **Scalable:** The WinAt-Work program enables workforce centers to build a business model and process that is scalable, replicable, and able to support multiple partners.

For more information, visit www.winatworkonline.com or call Carol Dierdorff at 678-244-5393.

