

## **Employability Skills Training for a New Generation of Learners:**

Clearing a path for success, longevity,  
and public funding



Employability skills training programs are in desperate need of rescue. There is a growing sense of frustration and failure among grant submission and grant-awarding entities that much of the money invested in these programs has been a waste. The consensus seems to be that although these programs are fundamentally important, they have not been successful at proving their worth.

### **Value Judgment: 3 key components**

1. To be successful, job readiness training programs must give clients the “soft skills” they will need to enter the workforce, earn an above minimum wage salary—and stay employed for the long term.
2. To ensure longevity, programs must be able to seamlessly integrate into a broad base of training scenarios.
3. To prove worthy of funding, programs must provide detailed statistics for measuring outcomes and gauging success.

This white paper seeks to show that WinAt-Work®, a technology-based training model that is both time-tested and newly modernized, is poised to change the face of employability skills training and breathe life back into these vital public programs.

### **A LONG HISTORY**

With a long history dating back to the late 1980s, WinAt-Work combines superior instructional design with new technology and modernized video to achieve powerful results.

### **PHASE I: THE LASERDISC YEARS**

In the late 1980s, Florida State University (FSU) Center for Instructional Development and Services sought to create an employability skills training piece for the State of Florida’s vocational education program. At the time, there was a big market and significant employer demand for this type of training—and big opportunities for funding via the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA).



The driver behind the development of FSU's employability skills training program was a man named Dennis Thorp.

### Lessons Learned from the Navy: A Cutting-Edge Training Model

Prior to joining FSU, Thorp had been doing contract work to develop a top secret intelligence training program for the Navy. The Navy model used computer-based training lessons and simulation exercises to teach techniques for breaking down enemy communications. Because the Navy project was extremely well funded, Thorp had many resources at his disposal that would not have been available to him otherwise. The skills and knowledge Thorp gained during that time were invaluable.

When it came time to develop the instructional design for the FSU program, Thorp led the design team in creating a technology-driven program, based largely on the lessons learned during his contract with the Navy.

The final instructional design of the FSU employability skills training program included:

- Eight video-driven training modules
- Built-in pre and post tests
- Easy-to-use management, tracking and reporting features.

### An Unknown Model; A Difficult Sell

Convincing funding organizations that interactive video was a legitimate medium for instruction was no easy task. Although technology-based training methods were being used in the military at that time, the approach was new and unfamiliar to most sectors of society.

After almost a year of talking to legislators and other leaders on the regional and state levels, Thorp finally got a foot in the door. The Florida Legislature and Palm Beach Schools agreed to put up \$100,000 for FSU to develop a one-module pilot program.

Breakthrough Innovation: Upon receiving the pilot funding, Thorp put together a team of experts to develop the "Interviewing Skills" module of the training. The finished piece was a huge success.



[www.winatworkonline.com](http://www.winatworkonline.com)

The most groundbreaking feature of the program's design was the use of video vignettes and real life simulations to engage, motivate, and educate the target learners. To make it successfully through the virtual interview and "get the job," the program required learners to physically interact and mentally engage with the training. These "gaming" features, as they are known today, were unheard of at the time.

**Full Funding at Last:** Sold on the unique effectiveness of the technology-driven model, JTPA invested nearly one million dollars for FSU to develop the rest of the program, purchased thousands of video disc players from IBM on which to run the program, and distributed the training throughout the state—enabling thousands of people each day to use it.

### PHASE II: THE CD-ROM YEARS

In the mid-90s, The Quality Group (TQG), an e-Learning solutions company, got the rights to convert the program from Laserdisc to CD-ROM. TQG brought the newly formatted training to market under the name Employability Skills-Training and Implementation Program (ES-TIP). Although the name and delivery system were new, the program itself remained unchanged.

**Early Arenas of Success:** From the mid-90s to the early 2000s, more than 400 diverse organizations—ranging from high schools, community colleges, and technical schools to workforce development agencies, corrections facilities, and non-profits—successfully incorporated ES-TIP into their programs.

**ES-TIP Case Study: A Creative Solution to a Prevalent Problem**

In 1997, The Georgia Fatherhood Program, in conjunction with the Technical College System of Georgia (TCSG), was funded by the Georgia Department of Human Resources to help unemployed non-custodial parents go back to school, earn a trade, and get a job that would allow them to make their child support payments.



### The Quality Group: A leader in e-Learning Solutions

Since 1992, TQG has been producing innovative e-Learning solutions that improve lives, organizations, and communities. TQG's purpose is to enable elegant, technology-powered learning experiences, with an ever-present focus on process improvement.

Moving forward, TQG aims to develop:

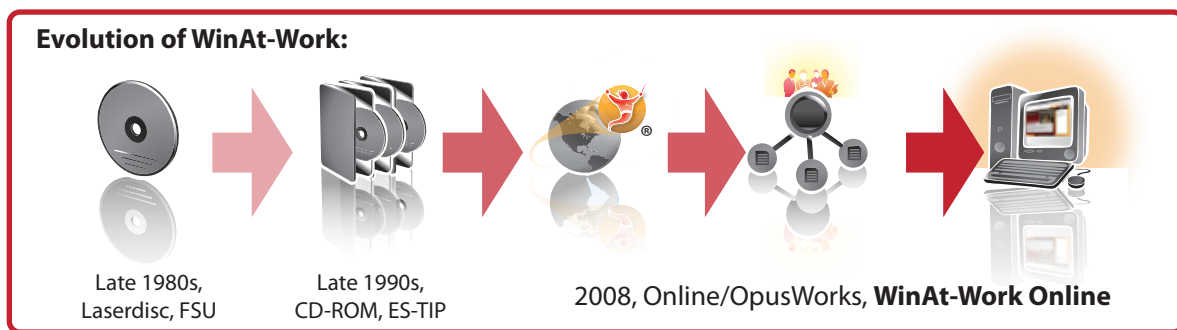
WinAt-Parenting,  
WinAt-Rehabilitation,  
WinAt-Reentry,  
WinAt-Recovery,  
and more.



It was an innovative ROI model that worked:

- The Fatherhood Program trained 3,000 people per year within its first two years.
- 65% of this hard-to-serve population (e.g. no high school education, multiple arrests, non-readers, etc.) went into employment—and stayed employed over a 6-month period of time.
- ES-TIP management and reporting features freed up limited staff, adding extra value to the ROI model.

An integral part of The Fatherhood Program, ES-TIP was standardized across the state for use in all 36 TCSG technical colleges.



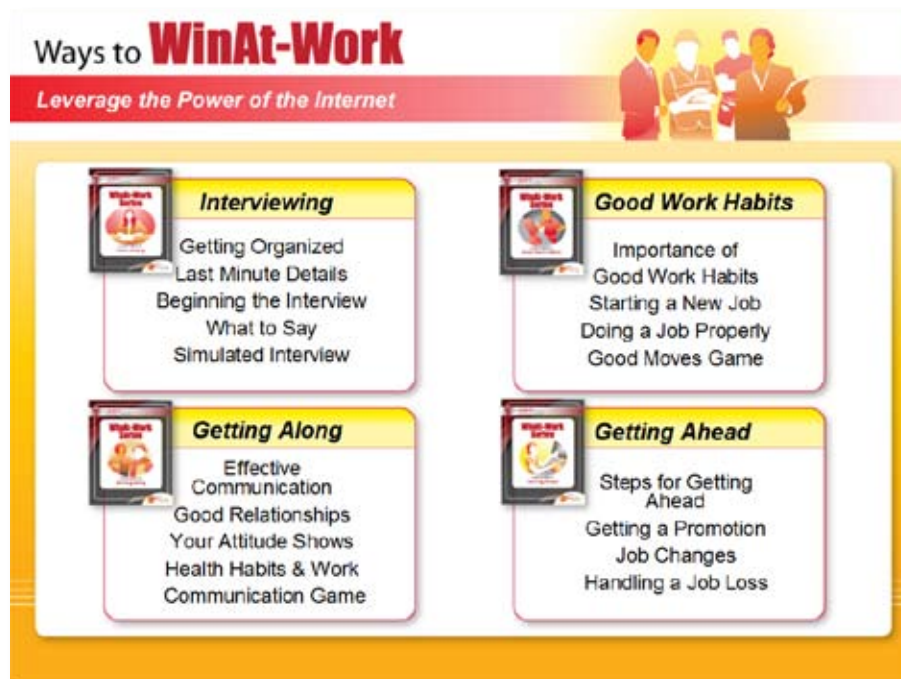
### PHASE III: WINAT-WORK ONLINE

**Upgraded Delivery, Modernized Video:** In 2008—responding to considerable employer demand for top quality employability skills training programs—TQG redesigned WinAt-Work for delivery on its powerful web-based portal technology, OpusWorks®. The administrative portion of the suite, OpusWorks Conductor, provides extensive user registration, testing, surveying, tracking, certificate printing, and reporting functionality—all online and available in real-time.

Determining the program's original instructional design to be far superior to anything else on the market, TQG refurbished all outmoded support materials, but left the nuts and bolts of the design unchanged. The video portions of the training, including some of the script, however, were quite dated and called for modernization.

Consulting with a team of in-the-field experts, TQG reworked the video script to incorporate fresh and pertinent workplace issues. With 100 pages of new script and 35 actors, TQG produced all new video for the program. The updated video features four training modules, including 6-8 hours of video vignettes in which actors face challenges that are real and relevant to today's target audience.





### APPLICATIONS AND OUTCOMES

**Superior Training:** Studies show that good online training can be 50% more efficient, 60% more effective, and 70% faster than traditional training. TQG's WinAt-Work Series exponentially increases these overall benefits by adding gaming, simulation, and interactive engagement features to its e-Learning model.

**Job Readiness Assessment:** Harbor Career Connections, a mental behavior health agency in Toledo, Ohio, received ARRA stimulus funding specifically for youth summer project programs.

Harbor used the WinAt-Work pre-test and post-test features for determining job-readiness. Pre-test results allowed Harbor to quickly assess clients' deficiencies and tweak the training to meet individual needs. After completing the WinAt-Work modules, clients scored an average 40-55% higher on their post-tests than they did on their pre-tests.

- Since May 2009, well over 1,000 youth and adults have gone through the program.
- WinAt Work, because of its online aspect, helped Harbor service a large number of clients very quickly, with no additional staff.



- Harbor expanded the program to include adults in the Ohio Workforce programs.
- Clients indicated they enjoyed the fresh, relevant video content, and they liked being able to work at their own pace.

**Rapid “Soft-Skills” Training:** The Arbor Education & Training, LLC, Arbor’s Salem Youth Project, serves three communities in central Oregon. Responding to an RFP announced by the Enterprise for Education and Training, Arbor proposed to recruit, train and place 120 out-of-school youth over the course of the summer.

Arbor partnered with TQG to integrate one week of WinAt-Work training into their accelerated job training and placement program.

WinAt-Work enabled fast, efficient, and enjoyable learning:

- Because of WinAt-Work’s online functionality, each Career Coach was able to facilitate training for up to thirty youth in a single setting.
- Average pre-test score was 63%; average post test score was 87%.
- In a post-participation survey, the youth expressed genuine enjoyment of the format and felt they learned a great deal of valuable information.

Organization	Learners	Average Pre-Test	Average Post-test	Increase
Arbor E&T	120	63	87	<u>38%</u>
Harbor	950	52	86	<u>65%</u>

**Drop-Out Prevention:** Communities In Schools of Georgia (CISGA) is the nation's largest dropout prevention organization. CISGA’s mission is to champion the connection of needed community resources with schools to help young people successfully learn, stay in school, and prepare for life.

### OpusWorks®: World-Class Technology

OpusWorks, TQG’s content creation and delivery suite, is used by many of the nation’s leading academic institutions and corporations—including Bank of America, AT&T, and Seagate (notably, Seagate implemented OpusWorks in 2005, one year before being named 2006 Company of the Year by Forbes magazine).

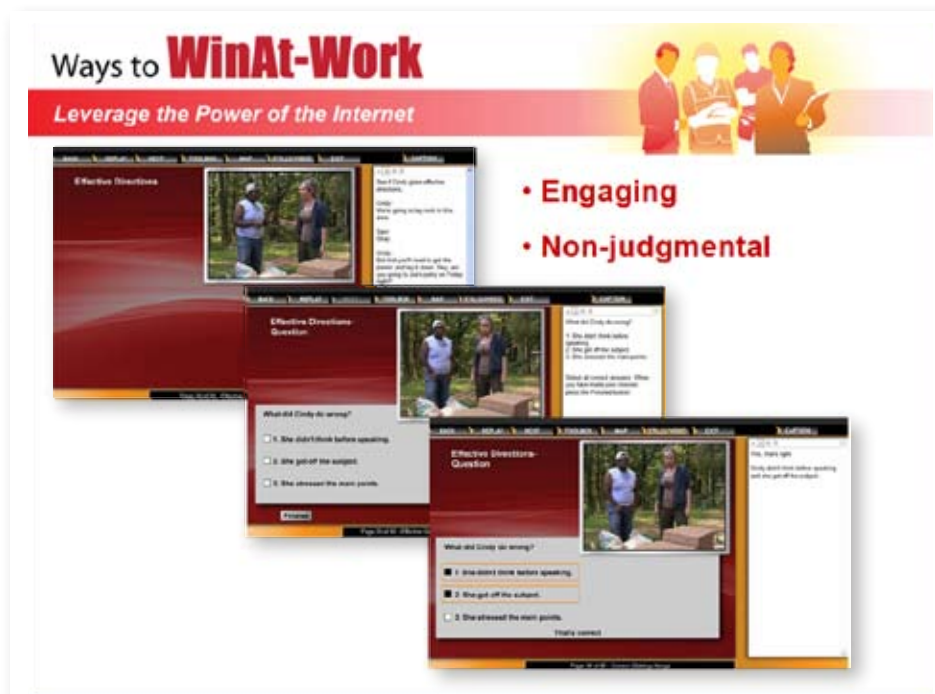
100% web-based, OpusWorks is easy-to-use, intuitive—and accessible from any computer, anywhere in the world where Internet is available.





CISGA is piloting an e-Learning program to address the drop-out problem by using WinAt-Work in eight of its Performance Learning Centers (PLCs). A key distinguishing feature of WinAt-Work is its use of video vignettes to teach by example. WinAt-Work videos use modeling behavior to literally show at-risk students what they've been doing wrong and the changes they can make to succeed at work—and in life. Inspired by this insight, students become more motivated to earn a diploma and more confident they can develop the skills necessary to thrive.

"PLCs are non-traditional settings for students who were struggling in the typical high school setting. In addition to earning their diplomas, these students are also striving to prepare for careers, college, and life," says Tom Roman, Training and Strategies Manager for CISGA. "We're incorporating WinAt-Work as part of our job shadowing and internship component to help all of our students get ahead! We're really excited about the program and can't wait to see the results!"



**Life Skills Training for a Challenged Demographic:** A teacher at Copper County Intermediate School District in Michigan is using WinAt-Work as part of a Life Skills training curriculum with her cognitively impaired students. The students, ranging in age from 16 to 26, have a variety of challenges.



To meet the special needs of her students, the ISD teacher breaks up the modules into 30 minute lessons, and then reinforces the lessons with discussion. Not only is the training well-aligned with the overall curriculum, but it is also effective, highly engaging—and fun:

- Students express remorse when one of the actors does something wrong and exclaim, “Oh, no!” out loud when they see that the actor on the screen is going to be in trouble.
- Often, students will purposely answer wrong to hear the results and giggle collectively at the responses.

To achieve top ROI from the WinAt-Work program, the school is also using the training as part of an English class, as partial credit for computer experience, and with their EI (emotionally impaired) students.

### **CONCLUSION**

At the beginning of this white paper, it was stated that three key components are necessary for the success—and funding—of job-readiness training programs. Clearly, WinAt-Work accomplishes the first objective: to give clients the “soft skills” they will need to enter the workforce, earn an above minimum wage salary—and stay employed for the long term:

- Video vignettes use powerful modeling behavior to effectively teach, empower, and motivate learners.
- Interactive video modules and “gaming” features successfully engage and provoke response from a 21<sup>st</sup> century populace of youth and adult learners.
- Online training works with a wide range of learning styles and is just as effective for non-readers as it is for readers.
- Self-paced e-Learning lets students go at their own pace, with headphones, allowing them to work through the modules in a non-threatening, non-judgmental setting.

WinAt-Work accomplishes the second objective as well—to seamlessly integrate into a broad base of training scenarios:

- Because it is delivered online, WinAt-Work can be incorporated at any stage of a program: front-end, middle, or back-end.





- The program can be included effortlessly into Fast Track programs or as an add-on to GED programs, literacy programs, entry-level customer service programs, etc.
- Curriculum is already set up and ready to go; it's easy to implement and use for learners, case managers, and administrators.

Measuring outcomes and gauging success via detailed statistics is a complex issue that deserves a closer look . . .

### Measuring Success: Challenges and Dilemmas

For employability skills training programs, providing comprehensive data for measuring success is an ongoing challenge. Once the job readiness training piece of a program is complete, data collection for long-term outcomes—such as how well clients apply their newly acquired “soft skills” (whether they get the interview, get the job, and keep the job)—changes hands and is no longer accessible to the distributors of the job-readiness training program.

In evaluating whether an employability skills training program warrants funding, its success must be measured by the outcomes that are within the program's scope, and not those for which it is no longer in control.

In order to clear a path for increased public funding of these vital community and national programs, a core shift needs to occur in the evaluation process.

WinAt-Work has evolved steadily and significantly over the years. It has been used by hundreds of organizations, in hundreds of scenarios; it has provided thousands and thousands of at-risk youth and adults with the skills, motivation, and confidence to succeed at work—and in life. Its robust online management and delivery system, OpusWorks, unrivaled in time- and cost-saving features, ensures top ROI for its users. It is this type of data, both relevant and accessible, on which employability skills training programs must be judged.

#### **In the short time WinAt-Work has been on the market,**

approximately 1,800 tracked learners have used the program—with a 92% completion rate!

Although thousands more are known to have used the training in its earlier versions, without OpusWorks' online tracking and reporting capabilities, there was no way to track usage.

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