

SHOP TALK # 14

Craft Trades: Career Path Opportunities for Adult Learners

Craft trades are those jobs critical to the nation's construction and manufacturing companies. The jobs may be at a downtown construction site, on the Houston ship channel, at a petrochemical plant, or at a nuclear power generating plant. Craft trades can include work in carpentry, construction technology, electrical, welding, masonry, plumbing, construction safety and management, and HVAC (heating, ventilation, and air conditioning). Potential entry-level opportunities for adults with limited basic skills and/or language proficiency include scaffolding and insulation work and helpers to the above mentioned trades.

How can adult learners get into the craft trades? Often, conversations with employers reveal a concern that too few individuals are entering the pipeline of potential workers. A few facts about craft trades for those of us who are neophytes to the world of business and industry are helpful:

- For every one worker operating a plant or facility, there may be six to nine workers in support roles. These workers are hired - not by the plant itself - but by contractors and suppliers to industry (think Toyota and the petrochemical industry, their subcontractors and suppliers).
- There are a number of craft trade career paths in operations, logistics, maintenance, construction, and technology.
- Career paths for craftsman/technician jobs often start with the position of helper and range from heavy machinery operators to pipe fitters to scaffold builders to shipping/inventory/warehouse management to instrument and lab technicians.
- Adults with a high school / GED diploma can qualify for craft assessment and training.
- Due to the shortage of skilled craftsmen, some industry sectors are beginning to consider workers with limited English language skills as potential candidates for crafts training.
- A number of adult learners already have experience in construction-related jobs. Training and career path opportunities may be options for those with the knowledge, skills, and behavioral expectations required.
- A barrier to overcome is identifying funds to pay for the training (have you found some?) so adult learners can make a successful, uninterrupted transition into post-secondary training.

The *Contren* Learning Series (Prentice Hall) provides construction, maintenance, and pipeline curricula for more than 35 craft areas, from the entry-level craftsman to project manager. The learning series was developed by the National Center for Construction Education and Research (NCCER). NCCER's National Registry provides a system for tracking and recognizing students' training accomplishments. For additional information: www.nccer.org and www.crafttraining.com.

Many community colleges offer entry level crafts training that can take a year or less to complete. Sometimes referred to as "fast track" or "quick careers" (titles vary among institutions), not all of these programs require a GED / high school diploma (see attached PDF file).

For local information about craft trades, adult education programs may contact the local Chamber of Commerce, industrial associations, or the nearest branch of the Associated Builders and Contractors (ABC) www.abc.org. Each branch has its own focus, depending upon local needs. Texas branches include:

- Austin – Central Texas Chapter
- Corpus Christi – Texas Coastal Bend
- Freeport – Texas Gulf Coast
- Houston – Greater Houston Chapter
- Irving – North Texas Chapter
- Nederland – Southeast Texas
- San Antonio – South Texas Chapter
- Victoria – Texas Mid Coast Chapter

SHOP TALK is a series of informative releases intended to highlight promising practices and address issues, concerns, and questions related to meeting the educational needs of Texas' emerging, incumbent, and displaced workers. For additional information or to request that a particular topic be addressed, contact Barbara Tondre at btondre@earthlink.net