

## Finding the best and the brightest

Written by

Thursday, 13 May 2010 13:12

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### **Skill building at the Ramsey County WorkForce Centers**

The real cost of hiring a person who cannot learn and perform a job is prohibitive, both for the employer and the worker. The National Career Readiness Certificate solves that problem. It is a work-related skills credential issued by ACT, the nationally-known testing service based in Iowa. The Certificate provides fair and objective measurement of workplace skills.

“A skills mismatch is eating away at productivity and revenue across all businesses, industries and government agencies,” says John O’ Phelan, Business Services Representative for WorkForce Solutions of Ramsey County, “To not fall further behind, we must address skills deficiency with urgency.”

Ramsey County WorkForce Centers are taking the lead by offering a nationally recognized assessment and development system for job seekers and businesses.

Since it began offering the National Career Readiness Certificate (NCRC) assessments in August of 2009, the North St Paul WorkForce Center has issued almost 400 certificates. Job seekers are tested in the foundation job skills of reading comprehension, applied mathematics and locating information. They are encouraged to quickly build their skills and confidence through the parallel online learning account Keytrain, also available free-of-charge at these two WorkForce Centers. Through a very successful partnership, teachers from the local Adult Basic Education centers are onsite at the WorkForce Centers to provide individual skills improvement help.

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“These three skill areas are critical to job performance and lay the foundation for job related communication, critical thinking and problem solving abilities”, says Barb Jordahl, Human Resources Manager at Cerenity Care Center of White Bear Lake. “The quality of candidate we hire, and his or her potential for success on the job, is much greater than before we began relying on the assessments.”

Businesses who partner with the local ACT- NCRC programs save time and money in screening, hiring, training and promoting employees. Minnesota’s Department of Transportation (MnDOT) has also just recently announced their decision to utilize two of the NCRC assessments in their hiring process for Transportation Associates and Generalists. MnDOT’s Project Manager, Christine Fisher, indicates, “We are excited about the possibility of working with the MN WorkForce Centers on pre-employment testing. This will allow us to use our human and monetary resources wisely.”

ACT’s significant research base has determined that the three skills comprising the NCRC are essential across a range of jobs—from entry-level to professional. Certificates are issued in four levels: bronze, silver, gold and platinum.

Although some job seekers express apprehension before taking these strictly timed, content-rigorous assessments, most are pleased with the results. Comments, Jim Anderson, former customer services representative in the midst of a career change: “Besides proving I have the critical thinking and adaptability skills needed for changing careers in mid-life, the National Career Readiness assessments were a super shot-in-the-arm for my self-confidence.”

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For more information about the ACT National Career Readiness Certificate visit [www.workkeys.org](http://www.workkeys.org)

For job seekers who want to complete a certificate, register online through the workshops registration tab at [www.jobconnectmn.us](http://www.jobconnectmn.us) .

*Businesses desiring assistance with employee screening, please call Karyn Berg at the North St Paul WorkForce Center at (651) 779-5652.*