

Employers Challenged to Help Build Tomorrow's Workforce

"Offering students work experiences allows us the opportunity to shape the future of Ontario by building the workforce of tomorrow," says Tom Flanagan, Provincial Partnership Council representative and President and COO of BMO InvestorLine.

On Tuesday April 20th 2004, employers, educators, and community leaders came together at the *Building Tomorrow's Workforce: Students in Today's Workplace* forum, as part of the *Passport to Prosperity* campaign. The event was supported by the Toronto Board of Trade, the Provincial Partnership Council (PPC), the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, the Human Resources Professionals of Ontario (HRPAO), the Ontario Ministry of Education, and the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges, and Universities. **Passport to Prosperity is an employer recruitment campaign to encourage more employers to offer high school students work experience.**



The Honourable David Peterson and high school students at the Passport to Prosperity Forum.

The Honourable David Peterson, former Premier of Ontario, spoke to the relevance of youth work experience in today's education and business communities. "There are real economic reasons for doing this," states Peterson. "We collectively and individually need to help each other in order to be competitive. We're in this together."

Offering work experiences to students provides benefits to employers. "As changing demographics place an increased strain on the supply of skilled resources, school-work programs can help build the talent pool and it is a great way to pre-test potential employees," points out Gerlinde Herrmann, President-Elect, HRPAO.

The Toronto Board of Trade recently released a report "*The Skills Advantage: Opening Doors for Youth and New Canadians*" on how to strengthen and build Toronto's skilled workforce. Their primary recommendation was providing work experience to youth.

"Students simply cannot benefit from school-work programs if the employers don't come forward," says Phil Evans, Vice-Chair, The Toronto Board of Trade. "We need you. The students need you. We need to address the needs of tomorrow's workforce today."



Tom Flanagan, Gerlinde Herrmann, and Phil Evans

Laughing and Learning at Second City

Some of the biggest names in comedy began their careers on The Second City main stage. Behind the scenes, some very lucky high school students are enhancing their education working at Second City's Education Company.

Second City prides itself on being fully immersed in the student work experience program and has hired dozens of co-op students over the years. When they set up the Education Company, they made the student work experience program a key element.

Including a high school student in an organization can offer a fresh and unique perspective. Jody Bishop, the creator and president of the Education Company is quick to point out that having students around is beneficial because it keeps everyone on their toes. "The main reason co-op helps us at Second City, is that you have to be able to take the acid test of what a grade twelve or grade eleven kid has to say about you."

Mr. Bishop is quick to praise school-work programs. "This is so good for these kids. Once you back them and believe in them and guide them, they grow. And believe me, they give you so much back in return."

Meghan Campbell, a student at Wexford Collegiate School of the Arts has been working at Second City through her school's co-op program. Her tasks at Second City have ranged from helping with phone calls and clerical duties to assisting with educational workshops and shows. "Co-op has really given me the chance to step out of my comfort zone, and really grow as a person in a short amount of time. I have to be so much more responsible and organized," Meghan says. "If somebody told me even at the beginning of the year how much I would change, I wouldn't have believed them."

Meghan believes that school-work experiences should be mandatory for all students. Her enthusiasm for her job, and Second City's commitment to student work experiences are proof that the benefits to students, and to the organizations employing them, are nothing to laugh at.

"I understand why my parents are so tired sometimes. Taking the subway back and forth, having to deal with people in a real job, unlike school, it is something that I can now relate to."

Meghan Campbell, Student



Meghan Campbell and Jody Bishop

Smart Young Workers are Safe Workers

"Young workers are six times more likely to be injured in their first month of work than any other time on the job," says Sue Boychuk, Coordinator of Young Worker Health and Safety, Ontario Ministry of Labour. "They need a whole different way of training and supervision."

Young people are often afraid to ask questions because they do not want to look stupid. If there is no supervision, training or a positive environment, where young people feel comfortable asking questions, the risk of injury soars.

When training young people it is important that the level of training matches the learning abilities of the youth. "The training they get is not always the training they need," says Ms. Boychuk. "They don't necessarily have the right experience to be able to adapt and to know the lingo and know how things work."

Keeping orientation and training interactive helps keep students interested and attentive. Asking young people to provide input, ideas and suggestions creates a positive environment by making students feel valued. It also exposes supervisors and employers to a whole new way of thinking that can be innovative and unique.

As part of the interactive training, having students repeat instructions can help ensure that everything is understood. Putting instructions in students own words can help clarify their understanding and means they are more likely to remember the information.

In addition to adequate training, it's important to evaluate the training. Did learning take place? Are students applying the learning? Did they perform the job correctly and safely? It is also important to provide positive reinforcement when a job is performed well, and safely.

For more information about workplace safety, please visit www.worksmartontario.gov.on.ca or www.youngworker.ca

Unique Work Opportunities Can Be Found in Every Part of the Organization

"Every organization has a variety of interesting work opportunities that students could benefit from," says Alice Strachan, Executive Director of the Ontario Learning Partnership Group (OLPG). "By looking beyond the obvious, employers can seek out and offer these opportunities to students."

"Work experience is giving students the opportunity to make better choices," says Anne Sasman, an Education Officer from the Ministry of Education. She believes that every organization could be involved in at least one type of school-work experience. "Our aim is to give students early and multiple opportunities to explore careers," says Ms. Sasman.

One company offering a range of student work experience is Toronto Hydro. "There is so much more to Toronto Hydro than just hydro," says Jennifer Reynolds, Manager of Community Involvement, Events and Sponsorship. Student experiences at Toronto Hydro take place in a variety of departments, with exposure to many skills including:

Human Resources – Job preparation, résumé writing and interview skills
Technology – Monitoring and mapping of electrical supply and distribution
Trade School – Apprenticeship program for skilled trades workers
Garage – Maintenance and repair for the fleet of over 600 vehicles
Metal and woodworking shop – Equipment maintenance and design
Electrical – Transformer repair and maintenance
Communications – Web page maintenance, public relations and marketing
Finance – Accounting and payroll administration
Legal – Administrative duties
Call Centre – Telecommunications experience

By finding unique and multiple options for school-work experiences, employers are helping to prepare students for their futures.

Tips for a Safer Workplace

It is the role of the employer and supervisor to ensure the safety of their workers. For example, a good employer/supervisor is someone who:

1. Works near or with the workers.
2. Is available if the worker has questions.
3. Provides feedback on how the job is being performed.
4. Is there for hands-on training until the work is performed correctly and safely.
5. Checks regularly to see if the worker continues to do the work correctly and uses all the safety measures and protective devices



Student Linda Tao visits a work site for her co-op placement at Black & McDonald Engineering

"We need to contribute to the youth and their development and provide them with a menu of choices. We can help the youth of today and tomorrow build a brighter future, not only for themselves but also for their families."

**Jennifer Reynolds,
Manager of
Community
Involvement, Events
and Sponsorship,
Toronto Hydro**

"Students, no matter what their destination, need an opportunity to try out what they might like to do."

**Anne Sasman
Education Officer,
Ministry of Education**

Showing Management the Benefits: How to Sell Student Work Experiences

"You need to have a strong business case," says Rod Eastman, a Human Resources Development Coach at Dofasco, where they are involved in a variety of school-work programs. "You need to continually communicate and re-communicate how supervisors will benefit directly. Approaching management with tangible benefits will more likely result in their buying-in."

Anthony Hopkins, Executive Assistant Manager at Le Royal Meridien King Edward Hotel agrees. They employ four to six co-op students a year. "We involve the management right up front, saying here's an opportunity for you to have someone working with you on an ongoing basis, who can help you achieve your business objectives."

Labour shortages and the expense of recruiting staff are two good reasons for participating in a school-work program. As Hopkins says, "It's certainly a low-cost approach to training and it provides a very good future recruitment source."

"One of the nice things about our corporate culture is that it's not hard to find senior managers and executives within our workplace who have themselves come into BMO through internships, or co-ops," says Aaron Young, Manager of University and College Relations for BMO. "Once you get management buy-in, great things can happen – for the company as a whole, as well as for students."

There are many reasons to support student work experiences. By doing your research, being prepared, and having a business case, you'll have greater success getting management support for the initiative. And, then as Eastman says, "It's a win-win for everybody."

Getting Buy-in from Key Decision Makers

Getting a school-work program up and running relies on the right people within the organization recognizing the advantages of the program.

Student work experiences can benefit most organizations, but getting management buy-in might seem like an obstacle. Here are a few tips to help get the buy-in needed to provide student work opportunities.

Get the attention of your organization

- Provide successful examples of possible school-work opportunities.
- Provide examples of organizations in your sector offering school-work experiences.
- Outline why it makes sense to offer high school students work experience.

Give your colleagues the information they need

- Provide decision makers with background materials on Passport to Prosperity.
- Outline any costs and planning associated with offering a student work experience (there is no obligation for employers to pay students).
- Provide details on who to contact to find out more.
- Direct them to the Passport to Prosperity website www.olpg.on.ca/passport

Make it easy

- Do your research before approaching decision makers.
- Anticipate questions and have the answers ready.
- Have a plan to show how your organization can get involved and what needs to be done.
- Offer to investigate any further questions.



Anthony Hopkins, Jennifer Reynolds, Aaron Young, and Rod Eastman

Educator Profile: Deborah Watson

"I have the best job. I get to work with amazing employers and students who are totally motivated, because if I've done a good job, they are in a placement they love and learning incredible things."

Deborah Watson is a Co-op Education Teacher at Toronto's Wexford Collegiate. Ms. Watson's job description includes interviewing students, providing in-school training sessions, developing learning plans with co-op employers and matching employers with students. She says that her job is a cross between being a fairy godmother and a match-maker.



"When you talk about a business case with managers, you really need to tie in the strategic and goodwill reasons for promoting youth employment, along with the actual business demands and challenges we're going to be facing as we move forward."

**Anthony Hopkins,
Executive Assistant
Manager, Le Royal
Meridien King Edward
Hotel**

"There is a compelling argument for using work experience as a recruiting tool. It reduces the cost of recruiting and increases the probability of a successful placement."

**Rod Eastman, Human
Resources Development
Coach, Dofasco**

Students Weigh-in About Work Experiences



"We are the future work force. Collectively we are young, we are enthusiastic, and we are eager to make a positive difference."

**Rita Giga, Student,
Hill Park Secondary
School**

Wherever a student participates in a work experience, it's clear that the benefits are numerous. Learning practical skills, as well as developing a greater understanding of the working world, creates opportunities that these students may not realize exist. As Woburn Collegiate Institute student Linda Tao says, "The co-op experience has shown me there are more windows in this world than I thought existed."

Rita Giga, a student at Hill Park Secondary School, recently moved to Canada from Zimbabwe. She has participated in two different work experiences, the first at Hamilton Teacher's Credit Union and the second with Cadillac Fairview at Limeridge Mall.

"I consider myself to be extremely fortunate for having the opportunity to participate," says Rita. "It's been a tremendous journey for me. These opportunities have taught me a lot about myself, my future career plans, and most importantly, the working world."

There is no doubt that the experience gained from her work placements will support Rita's future career plans within the marketing industry.

Carmen Farrugia, a student at St. Thomas More Secondary School, has been participating in school-work programs for three years. He's proud of the work experience that he's received from his placements at Tim Horton's and Fortino's. He is thankful to these employers for giving him the chance to work and is quick to put his goals into tangible terms. "When I finish co-op, I'd like to get a job with a paycheck."

Linda Tao knew that she wanted to be an engineer, but, she didn't know what kind of engineering she wanted to pursue. One of her teachers recommended that she do a co-op work placement with Black & McDonald, an engineering contracting firm. Linda's time there has shown her the value of practical experience. "Every day, I face new challenges because there are so many projects going on at the same time. There's a lot of information to absorb, and it's not always there in front of you in a textbook, like at school."

Linda has decided to attend a university that offers a co-op program for engineering so that she can develop more of those practical and valuable hands-on skills.

Sarah McVety, a student at The Woodlands School, took a co-op position as a Chef's assistant at *On the Curve*, a Mississauga restaurant. This decision had a profound impact on Sarah's career plans – she had originally wanted to work in radio. "By the end of my second day, I knew that being a chef was what I really wanted to do because I just loved it. I had a passion for it."

Sarah is very glad that she found a career that she enjoys so much. She will attend Humber College in September 2004 as part of the Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program. In the meantime, her hard work has paid off – she's still working at *On the Curve*, now as a pastry chef.

Sometimes in a co-op program you get more than just work experience. Meghan MacFarlane, formerly a student at Turner Fenton Secondary School, had a co-op placement at Extencicare Brampton as a geriatrics activities assistant. The relationships she developed with residents filled a void in her life after her grandmother passed away. "I loved all of the people. It didn't feel like a job to me, it was something I wanted to do."

Meghan says she couldn't wait for weekends to be over so that she could get back to work. She is now taking the Social Service Worker – Gerontology program at Sheridan College. She hopes to someday open her own nursing home.



"In that kitchen I gained self-confidence, and I gained a second family."

**Sarah McVety,
Student, The
Woodlands School**



Left: Rita Giga, Sarah McVety, Carmen Farrugia, Meghan MacFarlane, and Linda Tao

For more information call 1-800-387-5514 or visit the *Passport to Prosperity* website: www.edu.gov.on.ca/passport

For information about programs in your community, contact the **Ontario Learning Partnership Group** (a province-wide consortium of business-education councils and local training boards). Call 1-888-672-7996 or visit www.olpg.on.ca