

Creating a Workplace ELL Program

VI. Examples of Workplace ELL Programs

Marriott began the Sed De Saber (Thirst for Knowledge) campaign in 2006, offering hand-held educational devices to Spanish-speaking employees who were interested in learning the English language. In 2008, Marriott expanded its workplace language learning program to include the Global Language Learning program, which partners with Rosetta Stone to offer language learning programs in over 30 languages in Marriott locations all over the world. Marriott also expanded the Sed de Saber program to include portable educational devices for English-speaking employees who seek to learn Spanish.

McDonald's offers employees the English Under the Arches program, a nationally recognized workplace ELL program that provides English language instruction using a combination of technology and in-person instruction. McDonald's developed the program after realizing that many staff members held great potential for workplace advancement yet lacked the language skills to fully compete for the positions. English Under the Arches provides training on vocabulary and skills specific to the job requirements of the employees. The classes are free and are paid for by individual franchises. English Under the Arches has received national recognition for its innovative workplace ELL program.

In Northern Virginia, the **Fairfax County Office of Adult and Community Education** has contracted with area employers, including restaurants, hotels, banks, construction companies, and landscapers to set up worksite English classes since the mid-1980s. The classes, which meet twice a week for 12 weeks, are customized for each employer's needs and focus on vocabulary required for the job. Employers pay the county for the classes, purchase any necessary books, and pay their employees to attend. Approximately 25 to 30 employers participate in the program each year. Employers who have participated have reported better employee morale, improved safety, and better communication skills on the part of employees.

Trifinity Manufacturing, a company that makes air fresheners in Baltimore, MD, offers on-site English classes in partnership with Baltimore City Community College (BCCC). The company, formerly known as Medo, has sponsored this program since the early 1990s. BCCC pays for the instructors through a grant, and Trifinity pays employees half time to attend the classes. The classes are scheduled over an afternoon shift change so that employees can attend either at the beginning or end of their shifts. In past years, the company encouraged its employees to become citizens by offering citizenship preparation classes, reimbursing them for the cost of a naturalization application successfully completed, and honoring new citizen employees with a party. Over 30 employees successfully naturalized in this way. The company feels that the English and citizenship programs have paid for themselves many times over in terms of money saved on employee turnover. As a result of these programs, the company has an employee retention rate in the high 90s, loyal employees, and excellent morale.

Wegmans Food Markets, a chain based in Rochester, NY with locations in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Virginia, and Maryland, began offering English classes to its employees in 1999. The classes are

conducted two times per week, and employees are paid to attend. The company decided to offer the English classes in response to the shortage of convenient, affordable classes in local communities and a desire to improve employee retention through better advancement opportunities. Wegmans found that it retains 80 percent of English class graduates. In addition, employees who complete the English classes are more comfortable interacting with customers. Wegmans views the English program as a worthwhile investment that greatly benefits the company as well as the employees. As a result of the company's education programs and other employee benefits, Wegmans was ranked number two on *Fortune* magazine's list of the "100 Best Companies to Work For" in 2006.