

## **Learning and Implications from Worksite Financial and Investor Education\***

Worksite programs to date have provided insight via narrative and anecdotal information collected during interviews and surveys of local Educators. This learning, while not backed up by formal evidence, may nevertheless be helpful to educators who wish to design an effective worksite financial education project, or as suggestions for research projects themselves.

- *Extension educators were not always confident that they could effectively teach the subject matter.* Educators who were confident teaching basic financial management needed more intensive training to be comfortable with the concepts taught in investor education. Preparing local educators to teach took more training, and more intensive training than project planners had anticipated.
- *The logistics of responding to employer requests were sometimes difficult.* Employer requests for training were heavily concentrated in urban areas. This resulted in urban educators with waiting lists for classes and rural educators in some locales disappointed at being prepared to train but not asked to.
- *To be well-attended, sessions must be provided when employees are on the clock.* Sessions offered during the lunch hour were especially well attended when the employer provided lunch. Sessions offered immediately before or after shift changes were not well attended by employees not on the clock.
- *Moving worksite education from the stage of initial HR interest to scheduling classes is longer and more difficult than anticipated by project designers.* It often required multiple follow-ups and visits by the educator to get a commitment. HR

personnel often postponed scheduling sessions to avoid the summer vacation season and the winter holiday season. HR departments were often currently engaged in other employee education projects that they wished to complete before scheduling financial education sessions. If there were changes in company structure, ownership or benefits on the horizon, HR staff postponed sessions until a more stable working environment could be achieved. Months sometimes passed between the time initial interest was expressed by the HR department and the sessions were actually scheduled.

- *HR personnel are generally not easily engaged in providing a climate of support at the worksite.* They were generally willing to use free support material provided by the educator, but did not often choose to add any items that added to the cost of the program or additional time commitment from HR staff. A few employers, however, were engaged and allowed educators to do needs assessment, showed video clips and promotional material on closed circuit TV at the worksite and did bulletin board exhibits. One employer worked with the educator to purchase a lending library of tapes and books for employees. Several employers provided lunch during the sessions.
- *Employers are very protective of employee information and sensitive to liability issues.* Initially, a “pitch” for membership in Tennessee Saves was included as a part of each session. Some employers did not want to encourage Saves membership in programs that appeared to have company sponsorship, indicating that their cause for concern was liability issues that might be associated with collecting personal employee information such as address, email and financial

- goals and entering it on the America Saves database.
- *HR personnel were reticent to implement the program when changes in company ownership or benefits were anticipated.* In most cases, HR staff members were too busy working out the logistical changes involved with a new benefits structure. In some cases, HR staff believed that employee resistance to the changes would color the attitude of employees in a negative way, making them less receptive to the information.
  - *Providing programs on a fee-for-services basis did not appear to be an obstacle for large employers, but it did appear to be for small employers.* Most of the smaller employers initially inquiring about programs did not continue to be interested if they found that programs were fee-based.
  - *In spite of the evidence that financial stress impacts a broad range of workplace issues, HR managers were generally only interested in seat time in the classes as an outcome measure.* Although they identified employee use of 401(k) accounts for emergency loans as an area of high concern, they did not wish to use that criterion as an evaluation measure. Two or three employer owners of small companies were open to the possibility of a more formal longitudinal study including variables in a model or experimental trails using employee financial education as the intervention.
  - *Employers do not wish to limit a program that might be perceived as a company benefit to any one group of employees.* Although the young employee investor education program was targeted toward 18-24 year olds, many employers were reticent to exclude older employees. For those companies, educators did not limit

classes to 18 to 24 year olds. Instead they targeted industries and occupational clusters that included primarily the target age worker in their workforces.

Educators actually found administrators of technical and student co-op programs to provide more efficient access exclusively to the targeted age group than employers.

- *The most stressed employees need much more intensive intervention that can be provided by educational programs.* During pilot sessions and implementation, off-the-clock employees often remained to discuss financial concerns in more detail with the instructor. In some cases, the employees' dire financial situation was caused by high medical costs, a period of unemployment, or simply household income below the livable wage. Employers who value otherwise productive employees might consider employing a counselor and providing some means for intervention such as access to debt management services. Employee counseling that outlines an employee career path that leads to increasingly responsible and higher paying positions within the company can sometimes help financially stressed employees see past their current money crunch.

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