

Hispanic Worker Integration in the Wood Products Industry

The Challenge

The Hispanic population, one of the fastest growing in the United States, is providing a new workforce for many industries around the Nation. The wood products industry, as with other labor-intensive industries, must work hard to keep its competitive edge. As with any new opportunity, there are challenges to overcome; key among them is the language barrier. Managers need to communicate effectively with workers, not only to successfully integrate them into the workforce, but to assess skills and training needs and assure workplace safety. Therefore, it is essential that employers educate themselves and other employees on how to communicate successfully with workers who may speak a different language.

The Solution

The Wood Education and Resource Center provided funding to the Indiana Hardwood Lumbermen's Association to identify and provide effective ways to communicate with and assist Hispanic employees. This initiative involved a number of partners, including the Wood Machinery Manufacturers of America; Appalachian Hardwood Manufacturers, Inc.; Architectural Woodwork Institute; Association of Woodworking and Furnishings Suppliers; Kitchen Cabinet Manufacturers Association; Wood Components Manufacturers Association; and the Wood Products Manufacturers Association.

This collaborative effort resulted in a Web site to help integrate Hispanic workers into the wood products industry. It contains practical, informative, and relevant information that helps both employers and workers understand and work with Hispanic employees. The policies and guidelines on the Web site can be customized to fit a company's individual needs.

Resulting Benefits


- More competitive wood products businesses
- Stronger relationships among managers, the Hispanic community, and among employees
- A safer, more productive work environment
- Better employee motivation, satisfaction, and empowerment

Sharing Success

The Web site has several informational products to help managers and Hispanic workers in the wood products industry to work more effectively together.

Today's evolving workforce requires employers to develop more effective communication skills.

A SMALL GUIDE FOR THE HISPANIC IMMIGRANT



A Small Guide

FOR THE HISPANIC IMMIGRANT

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Welcome!

This small guide has been written especially for you, the Latin American or Hispanic immigrant working in the United States. The purpose of this writing is to offer a summary of practical information that will be useful in traditional American life. There is no doubt that a lot of opportunities for success exist in this country. Nevertheless, many of those opportunities are often missed by not knowing how things function in America. Differences in our culture and difficulties caused by not knowing the English language complicates the access to information necessary to achieve success in America.

Although we do not intend for this document to cover all information, we try to answer many of the questions that sometimes cause difficulties while living in this country. This document aspires to serve as a guide or manual for the Hispanic immigrant. Our desire is that the reader not only reads the report, but that they also are inspired to seek more information, to help best adapt to American life, and to find the happiness in the elusive "American Dream."

In our discussion of Hispanics and "Americans" we will be focusing on common characteristics: language, values, socialization and cultural heritage. The use of generalization is



a valuable tool in helping us to better understand and predict the behaviors of a group of people. However, it is important when interacting with any group, to consider each person as an individual.

The English Language

Do you speak English? If the answer is "no," we suggest that you work hard to learn. Knowledge of English is of great importance to acquire success in America; but you must recognize that it is very difficult to learn. In many parts of the United States a person can live perfectly well without speaking a word of English. When you are not forced to speak English, it is easy "to leave it for tomorrow."

Do not leave it for tomorrow! While you could continue to live without learning the language, to not know English closes the doors to a lot of personal opportunities; especially because a great deal of information for assistance in this country is available only in English. If you do not know any English, it is probably best to take a course. Many public schools offer courses free or very

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This guide contains practical information for Latin American or Hispanic immigrants working in the United States.

These can be found at <http://www.na.fs.fed.us/wihispanic/Default.htm>. The publications include:

- "A Small Guide for the Hispanic Immigrant," which contains practical information for Latin American or Hispanic immigrants working in the United States. It can be downloaded in Spanish or English. This publication won the 2004 APEX Award for publication excellence.
- "Employee Handbook Template," a template of policies and procedures that can be customized for any company.
- "Spanish/English Wood Products Terminology," an audio glossary of "survival" language skills designed to help both managers and Hispanic workers. This resource recently won The Communicator's Crystal Award of Excellence in an international competition honoring excellence in audio communications.



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