



# WORK-BASED BASIC SKILLS TRAINING IN NORTH RHINE-WESTPHALIA

## GOOD PRACTICE IN SMES

**EDITED BY:** **bbb Büro für berufliche Bildungsplanung, R. Klein & Partner GbR**

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Ministerium für Arbeit,  
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# WORK-BASED BASIC SKILLS TRAINING (WBBS) – A BUILDING BLOCK TO SECURE SKILLED LABOUR

The need of business for suitable skilled workers is increasing in many areas. It is therefore worthwhile for companies to also take into account the promotion of basic skills among the low-skilled.

Companies benefit from work-based basic skills training offers as well as semi-skilled and unskilled workers: errors in order processing or the operation of machines are reduced; operating procedures and work results improve; the individual employability increases.

The particular nature of the tried-and-tested WBBS training offers is that they are carried out close to the workplace and are based on the actual development needs of the employees at their respective workplaces. New learning formats such as individual coaching enable rapid development of professional skills and secure and improve individual employability.

This brochure presents some successful practical examples of workplace-oriented basic skills training in small and medium-sized enterprises in North Rhine-Westphalia, which the bbb designed and implemented together with the companies within the framework of the project "Gruwe – Grundbildung bewegt Unternehmen" (funded by the North Rhine-Westphalian state government and European Social Fund).<sup>1</sup>

The four practical examples illustrate clearly how one can succeed in strengthening the occupational competence of low-qualified employees. The beneficiaries are both the companies thus making a contribution to securing skilled workers and the employees who strengthen their employability – a classic win-win situation for everyone involved.

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Rosemarie Klein



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**Editor:** Rosemarie Klein,  
bbb Büro für berufliche  
Bildungsplanung, R. Klein &  
Partner GbR, Dortmund.

**Translation:** Edith Adam

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Fig. 1: Ulrike Funken, Nina Jung, Christiane Houben (from left)

## APPRECIATION, MOTIVATION, GOOD WORKING ATMOSPHERE – EFFECTS OF WORK BASED BASIC SKILLS (WBBS)

The family-owned company Bauer Funken GmbH & Co. KG, based in Kempen, was founded in 1879. Already in the 1980s, the company cultivated unusual vegetables for Germany, such as sweetcorn, fennel or celery. In the meantime, the crops are being processed into convenience products. With a wide range of salads, ready meals, snacks and dressings, the company supplies universities, canteen kitchens, retailers and restaurants daily. [www.bauerfunken.de](http://www.bauerfunken.de)

### THE CONCERN - MANAGING DIRECTOR ULRIKE FUNKEN

»Our company is internationally positioned. Due to the multitude of cultures and nationalities, it was our concern that these employees improve their subject-specific vocabulary. We therefore contacted the Adult Education Center Viersen. During a telephone conversation with Ms. Jung, the responsible head of department, we learned about the possibility of a tailor-made work based basic training offer in our company.«

### **THE CONTACT TO THE ADULT EDUCATION CENTER VIERSEN**

In a personal conversation between the Adult Education Center Viersen and the company, the precise concerns and educational needs were clarified and the organization of the offers was discussed. It was agreed that the offers would be held outside working hours, as it was impossible to release employees for training during the season.

Very concrete training goals were expressed. By participating in the offer, employees should be able to understand and implement work instructions. They should dare to ask questions if something was unclear. This increase in work-specific vocabulary and communication skills should reduce errors in the work processes and avoid misunderstandings.

**»The offer of the Adult Education Center of the district of Viersen includes a broad spectrum of work-based basic skills training-relevant content and a lot of expertise in the individual departments. Last but not least, the adult education center is an important partner in the mediation of contacts between companies, WBBS- trainers and educational projects such as Gruwe. «**

**Nina Jung**

### **FROM PRACTICE - TRAINER CHRISTIANE HOUBEN**

»While we initially expected eight learners, it quickly became 12 and later 14 participants, so that we formed several groups. The offers specifically focused on understanding and actively dealing with numbers, times, colors, units of measure, geometric shapes and various types of fruit and vegetables. There was a lot of work with word-picture material. In addition, participants used workplace-specific communication situations to express themselves linguistically in the past and in the future. By addressing their specific concerns, the participants felt valued and taken seriously. Quickly there were small success experiences in the daily work. This motivated the participants to further improve their German language skills. «

**Christiane Houben**



**Christiane Houben**

Trainer

### THE BENEFIT

»The attendance of the participants and the interest in the offers were impressive, even though they took place outside working hours. More and more employees wanted to participate. The offers have clearly helped to promote the work-specific and general German language skills of the participants. We also found that they feel more valued as a workforce, which also has a positive impact on the working atmosphere.

Ulrike Funken



**Nina Jung**

Head of the District Adult Education Center Viersen

"What is interesting for us as an adult education center in the concept of work-oriented basic training is in particular that we reach target groups that are otherwise more difficult to reach. Unfortunately, the low-skilled, in their own initiative, are still less likely to seek contact with educational institutions than highly qualified individuals. However, this group takes the place of work as a place of learning and experiences the offers as useful for their own development. It is also convincing in the AoG concept that employees are reached who are not always directly in the focus of in-company training in the company. «

Nina Jung

### PIVOTAL POINTS FOR SUCCESSFUL WBBS-TRAININGS

»Difficult conditions such as shift work and high workloads of employees need services that adapt to these difficult conditions. Often a flexible change of the original training concept is necessary. Good cooperation and short channels of communication between the trainer and the responsible person in the company are a prerequisite for this. "

Nina Jung



Fig. 2: Christiane Houben prepares a vocabulary exercise on technical terms



## EVERYONE LIKES PRODUCTION WITH FEWER MISTAKES

### BASIC SKILLS TRAINING PROMOTES A COMMON UNDERSTANDING OF QUALITY

The company Friedrich Freek GmbH from Menden in the Sauerland was founded in 1950 as a manufacturer of electric heating elements. Freek employs about 60 people. In the meantime, the product range has been decisively expanded and successfully positioned in the market.

[www.freek.de](http://www.freek.de)



#### THE CONCERN - MANAGING DIRECTOR WOLFGANG KAISER REPORTS

»Freek employs a large number of people in the field of manufacturing, some of whom have needs for qualification in basic training. The goal is to continue positioning our company in the international context in the future. Also in the project StraKosphere, which is funded by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research,

we deal with the competence development of production employees. Our employees are always the most important resource that we would like to qualify continuously with a tailored training program. As part of our development of educational strategies, as a company, we have filtered out training needs at various levels. In the field of manufacturing, it is about basic mathematical and technical skills, in-house communication and the development of a common understanding of quality. When we read about the possibility of work-based basic training in the daily newspaper, we contacted Adult Education Center Menden-Hemer-Balve.«



**Wolfgang Kaiser**

Managing Director  
Friedrich Freck GmbH

»Work-based basic training thrives on strong educational partners who not only sell training but can effectively initiate and accompany individual development processes. The knowledge about the new service of work-based basic training often comes about through personal contacts to the companies, but also, as in this case, via a newspaper article! «



**Achim Puhl**

Head of Adult Education  
Center Menden-Hemer-  
Balve

The work-based basic training was titled "Technical Drawing and Mathematics" and had the following contents:

- Representation of shapes, dimensions and information on manufacturing tolerances
- sections and perspectives
- 3-dimensional bodies
- basic mathematical knowledge, such as conversion of scales, rule of three and percentage calculation



#### **DEVELOPMENT OF THE TRAINING CONCEPT**

»During the planning it was important for us to translate the daily work processes of production into learning contents. So the participants immediately realized the benefits of the new knowledge. It was important to ensure that employees did not experience themselves as deficient in work based basic skills training. Together with Mr. Kaiser, we therefore decided to work with a variety of methods and exercises. This way it should become possible for participants with heterogeneous knowledge still to learn in one group. It was important for Mr. Kaiser and me to invest time in advance and to talk about contents, methods, levels of knowledge and objectives of the training. «

Achim Puhl



**Matthias Schulte**

WBBS-Trainer

**FROM PRACTICE – WORK BASED BASIC SKILLS TRAINER MATTHIAS SCHULTE**

»A preliminary agreement between me and Mr. Kaiser about the concrete contents and goals of the work based basic skills training was also very important. Again and again we talked to each other after individual training sessions. The employees came from different departments. Through the WBBS-training, they got insights into other departments and their operations. This allowed them to understand what the processing of the products looks like, what their own function is in that process and why quality in manufacturing is so important. In order to get to know the work of the employees, I have been an intern in various departments. During the training itself there was a lively exchange between the participants and me. We worked on new questions on already edited topics. However, the employees always brought in new topics or wishes for more practice phases. «

**THE BENEFIT**

»First and foremost, the employees were able to develop their basic mathematical and technical understanding. In addition, there are many other areas that have developed positively: The employees were sensitized to their own responsibility for the faultless end product. The quality of production was increased. There was also a development in the field of social skills. «

Wolfgang Kaiser

**PIVOTAL POINTS FOR SUCCESSFUL WBBS-TRAININGS**

»In the first place, clear preliminary agreements between companies and educational institutions as well as between trainers and companies are essential. Thus, the training needs can be clearly identified and educational content tailored to the company's needs. Of course, the selection of a technically competent trainer is important for this, but at least as important is that he has competencies in dealing with the target group and conveying content. Afterwards, a discussion of the results is helpful in defining further development prospects. The attitude to WBBS-training also makes the success. Learning experiences must be positive. Learning must be concrete, connected to the learning biographies and take people on a positive journey. « Achim Puhl



# COPE WITH WORKPLACE CHALLENGES

## INSIGHTS INTO TAILORED WBBS-COACHING FOR A PRODUCTION EMPLOYEE

C. HOHAGE GmbH & Co. KG has been designing and manufacturing technically sophisticated wire and strip bending parts for more than 150 years. In addition, C. HOHAGE punches, welds and assembles according to individual customer requirements. C. HOHAGE is a successful supplier and partner of international retailers in the construction, textile and drugstore markets with its merchandise display systems. [www.hohage.de](http://www.hohage.de)

### THE CONCERN - MANAGING DIRECTOR THE CONCERN - PERSONNEL DEVELOPER AND PURCHASING MANAGER MICHAEL KUSE

»Mr. Klein is a professionally good and motivated employee from the section of warehousing and logistics, who will also be operating as a delivery driver in the future. His ability to communicate, his repertoire of technical terms as well as the reading and understanding of work instructions, also with regard to the acquisition of the truck driver's license, are limited in the daily work routine. We saw a need for action and sought a dialogue with the employee. The proposal to promote him through work-based basic skills training has aroused great interest in Mr. Klein. He agreed immediately.«

### FROM PRACTICE – WORK BASED BASIC SKILLS TRAINER MANUELA SCHÄFER

»In order to develop the concrete topics of the WBBS-coaching on the qualification requirements of the company and the employee, I looked at Hohage's operational procedures on site together with the employee. He showed me and described his activities and processes. Participating in his professional life in this way was the prerequisite for developing concrete and precisely fitting coaching. It was ideal to carry out the coaching on site, in the company. We met after the regular working hours of Mr. Klein once a week for 90 minutes in a meeting room. Proximity to the workplace was useful as we were able to use the realities of his workplace as a real learning situation. On the basis of subject-specific texts and in-house materials – delivery notes, work orders, brochures and so on – we trained understanding reading and free speech. Another advantage was the opportunity of getting in contact with the direct supervisor and Mr. Klein's colleagues. They were very positive about the offer.

Other topics in the coaching were learning strategies for the exam preparation for the truck driving license. It was also about dealing with stress and the associated linguistic "black-outs", as Mr. Klein called it. For this we have made breathing techniques, exercises for a structured approach and a change of perspective. «



»Our employees and their potential are the foundation of our company.«

**Michael Kuse**

Personnel developer and purchasing manager C. HOHAGE GmbH & Co. KG



**Manuela Schäfer**

Trainer



Fig. 3: A WBBS Coaching Situation

#### THE BENEFIT

»Applying what has been learned directly at the workplace proves to be particularly useful. Another positive factor is the increased ability to concentrate. Mr. Klein accomplishes his tasks with more peace of mind and good time management. He has become more stress resistant. Mr. Klein understands the subject-specific vocabulary and uses it actively. The training has led to a significant expansion of his skills, and he has achieved his goals with work-oriented coaching. «

Michael Kuse

»The study of learning strategies has helped Mr. Klein in particular with the preparation of the exam for the truck driving license. He also applies the required vocabulary in his daily work. He works much more concentrated and the short exercises help him – as he says himself – out of the stress trap now. His verbal black-outs are much better under control. «

Manuela Schäfer

#### PIVOTAL POINTS FOR SUCCESSFUL WBBE TRAININGS

»The WBBS-coaching is certainly "a leap into the cold water", as it does not meet the usual standards of training. But it is especially the flexibility and the precise and individual view of the needs which makes this kind of coaching so interesting and successful. The learning transfer and the interim and final interviews between trainer and superior are necessary in order to adapt learning content and to keep an eye on the scope of the offer. We consider it indispensable to focus on the development of low-skilled workers, as their potential is often not exhausted. We must reach these employees as an important resource for securing skilled labor. So, 'open your eyes' and see who can be promoted. «

Michael Kuse





## FIT FOR THE NEW WORKPLACE IN SHIPPING

### WBBS-COACHING SERVING AS A GUIDE IN OCCUPATIONAL REINTEGRATION

The medium-sized family business Schmitz u. Söhne GmbH & Co. KG develops, manufactures and sells medical furniture for hospitals and medical practices. The owner-managed company operates worldwide today. Sales partner is the specialized medical technology trade. [www.schmitz-soehne.com](http://www.schmitz-soehne.com)

#### THE CONCERN – HEAD OF THE SHIPPING DEPARTMENT WOLFGANG STRÖVER

»The aspects quality and service play an important role in all areas of Schmitz u. Söhne. To implement this claim, qualified employees are the key factor. This applies to all employees, including those working in lower positions. Due to illness one of our long-term employees was only limited able to carry out his previous activity. As part of the company's reintegration management, together we have been able to find a new work assignment for him. For the new job, however, IT skills are needed that our employee did not have to the required degree. The Netzwerk Industrie RuhrOst e.V. (NIRO) informed us about the Work based basic training offers. «

FROM PRACTICE – WORK BASED BASIC SKILLS TRAINER ANNETTE

## HEIDEMANN

»In shipping, IT plays an increasingly important role. In this WBBS coaching, it was first of all important to relieve the participant of the fear of dealing with office programs, so that the employee is less likely to have to ask his colleagues for help and to be able to independently handle work tasks. One focus was the competent and confident handling of the programs Word, Excel and Outlook. Very helpful were the company's files, materials, and tasks that we could use to practice. The contents were repeated frequently and enough time was devoted to test what he had learned on his own. «



**Wolfgang Ströver**

Head of the shipping department at Schmitz und Söhne

»After the IT offer our employee is able to carry out his new work content in a routine, self-assured and joyful manner. The WBBL coaching has given him the opportunity to work on a task which is new to him, which he implements reliably and to the fullest satisfaction of the customer.«

## PIVOTAL POINTS FOR SUCCESSFUL WBBE TRAININGS

»We have experienced that employees, regardless of age and educational level, are open to further training and thus to a professional reorientation. Although the learning speed of older employees is lower, especially in the IT sector, than in the younger generation, this is no reason to exclude this target group. The employee himself is at the core of this process. Therefore, it is important to include him in such a project from the beginning, so that willingness is created to internalize this learning content. «

Wolfgang Ströver



**Annette Heidemann**

Trainer

»WBBE coaching is characterized above all by the peculiarity of the learning situation, since it is closely interwoven with the daily work or with the company. During the coaching, the cooperation with the company was very important. It is very beneficial when working in WBBE coaching with materials and exercises that really relate to the - in this particular case, prospective - workplace. The commitment of Mr. Ströver has proven to be especially supportive, as he has arranged the company reintegration. «

Annette Heidemann