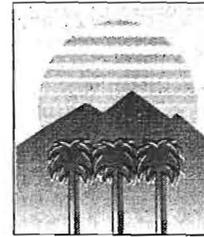


SUNDAY
September 28, 1997

The



Sun

SAN BERNARDINO
COUNTY

English language problems mount in the workplace

Many companies are coping with employees who immigrated to the United States and may have a language problem that limits communication.

The inability to speak English in the workplace poses a challenge for many employers. When hiring employees, especially at the entry level, many employers attract job applicants with only limited English speaking skills.

One of my clients in the Fontana area recently identified about 50 employees who had worked for the company for some time, but had limited English speaking skills. The human

Marie Hayashi Reichelt



CORPORATE PERSPECTIVE

resources manager asked for an assessment of their ability to speak and read English.

Two objectives emerged: Assess English language requirements for prospective employees, and identify

English speaking/reading abilities of current employees.

The Job Applicant English Skill Assessment has three parts: 1) English skill assessment; 2) reading and comprehension and 3) safety operations. The Vocational English Training Pre-assessment for current employees has four parts: 1) reading and comprehension; 2) forklift operation; 3) fire prevention program and 4) general operations flowchart.

The employer plans to use these assessment tools for prospective employees to make sure that they have an under-

standing of English at a specific level. All job applicants must pass this test before being hired.

For the current employees, the employer will offer English as a Second Language (ESL) classes to the employees in need of instruction through a local junior college. After taking these classes, the expectation is that the employees will be retained provided they demonstrate adequate English communication skills.

The company has identified that English speaking skills are critical for efficient operations.

By using assessment tools, the company identified specific language issues and is able to help each employee determine if instruction is required for continued success in the workplace. By offering ESL courses to employees, this company has taken a pro-active approach in addressing its language barriers on the job. With education, everyone wins.

Marie Hayashi Reichelt is a management consultant and author. This column appears occasionally in The Sun. Send questions to Corporate Perspective, Business Section, The Sun, 399 N. D St., San Bernardino 92401.