



Mayor Thomas M. Menino kicks off the workplace ESOL initiative with Robert Nagle and employees of John Nagle Company at the Boston Marine Industrial Park

English at Work at the Boston Marine Industrial Park

COMPANIES, WORKERS AND CITY TEAM UP TO MAKE ENGLISH A PART OF THE FUTURE

Twice a week, Juan Cartagena leaves his post as floor supervisor in the Fish House for a seat in a classroom high above the warehouse.

Still in their uniforms, Cartagena and his colleagues join workers from other businesses for an English class designed to give them skills they will use on the job. Their companies are part of a pilot initiative that brings together businesses at the Boston Marine Industrial Park in South Boston in order to expand ESOL programming into the workplace.

Cartagena himself is a perfect example of the significance of this effort: although he has been in the United States for ten years and has worked in the seafood industry for nine of those, this is his first ESOL class.

“Having the chance to study English inside the company like we are doing is a very important opportunity,” says Cartagena, who is responsible for filling over 100 orders a week and overseeing a team of seven workers.

John Nagle Company, his employer,

was one of four businesses to join the program in March of 2007.

In the Swordfish and Tuna section, Roberto Mejia is excited about the classes. “Speaking English, everything is better,” he says. “I can provide better service to the customers, so that they can get exactly what they need, so that they continue coming back. When we speak English, we can create more business for the company.”

Sonia Gonzalez, the production supervisor and a seven-year employee at nearby Global Protection, provides an oral and written production report at the end of each day. A few weeks into her classes, she was already being complimented on her progress.

Communication improvements like these enticed Global Protection, a condom manufacturer, to join the initiative. Human Resources manager Julie Crump explains, “Communication has everything to do with efficiency. The quicker you catch on, the quicker you can get down to business. That’s an improvement in efficiency.”

ENGLISH AT WORK AT BOSTON’S MARINE INDUSTRIAL PARK

The workplace ESOL pilot at the Boston Marine Industrial Park was launched in March of 2007. The Park is home to over 100 small and mediumsized employers. The workplace ESOL initiative supports these “backstreets” businesses and increases access to ESOL in the city.

English classes from literacy level to intermediate level meet twice a week for two hours.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

Companies: Provide two hours/week of paid release time per student employee, and participate in monthly advisory meetings. Some companies also provide classroom space.

Workers: Provide two hours/week of their own time, and commitment to attend class regularly. The split ensures company and worker commitment to the program, and reflects the benefits of the program to both.

Jewish Vocational Service: Provides English instruction, business recruitment, needs assessment, curriculum design, and data collection.

ENB/ THE MAYOR’S OFFICE FOR JOBS AND COMMUNITY

Services: Provides financial support, public relations, and oversight.

“I’m proud to launch this English at Work program and I want to thank the BMIP employers who have stepped up to the plate to help us. Their leadership will go far in advancing the careers of their employees.”

—Mayor Thomas M. Menino

For Harpoon Brewery, English is a matter of safety. “Our bottling line has a lot of moving parts,” says Daniel Kenary, Harpoon CEO and president of the BMIP Business Association. “It’s critical that employees be able to communicate clearly and quickly.”

In addition to increased customer service, greater efficiency, and improved workplace safety, benefits of workplace ESOL programs include reduced errors and increased flexibility. Workers who participate in ESOL programs like this one also show higher mobility and retention rates.

For Robert Nagle, Treasurer and Manager for Production at John Nagle Company, the project makes good business sense. “These employees are very important to our businesses,” he says. “Hard working, loyal employees – you can’t just go and find them. When we provide things like this it’s another reason that makes them want to stay with us.”

Yet while a growing number of larger companies offer ESOL and other training opportunities, it is a challenge for smaller employers. At John Nagle, about 40% percent of the company’s employees have difficulty with English. Yet with only 70 employees total, Nagle would find it hard offer classes—at different levels of English—while maintaining operations. In the freezer, for example, all three workers signed up for classes, but only one can be out at a time.

Bringing together several businesses provides scale and makes workplace ESOL a reality at BMIP. As more companies become involved, new levels and hours will be added, allowing the program to better accommodate the diverse needs of the workers and businesses. Already, the program has changed the culture at companies like John Nagle and Global Protection. “It’s having a positive effect on morale,” says Crump. “The people participating seem to enjoy it. They have discussions about what they’re learning. They’re interacting with our other staff in a different way too. It’s bringing out more free flow of conversation.”

Having classes at work adds value because students use their workday to keep learning: “They ask me how to say this or that word,” says Cartagena of the workers in the Fish House. “So I try to teach them, and they try to memorize it and the next day, they ask me something else.”



Juan Cartagena of John Nagle Company reviews shipments with a worker at the Fish House.

“I feel excited,” says Gonzalez. “I’m very happy that they gave us this opportunity.” Like others, Gonzalez hopes that improving her English skills will help her to move to better positions within the company. “This class can help us to improve our lives,” she says.

Cartagena knows that the class will not only help him, but will also aid his five-year-old son. “When he goes to school, I want to be able to help him with his homework,” says Cartagena. “I think the company is doing a great thing. It’s very important for all those who want to learn to have this opportunity thanks to the City of Boston and John Nagle.”

“It’s absolutely worth our investment,” says Crump. Reflecting on the support of the City of Boston and other funders and businesses, she adds, “If what they ultimately want to see is a better Boston, it’s a great way to enhance the work and personal lives of people. You can’t even measure the positive effects. It’s not just when they go to class, or when they’re at work. It’s impacting every aspect of their lives.”



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English for New Bostonians (ENB) is a public-private-community collaboration addressing the urgent need for increased English language learning opportunities for adult immigrants in Boston. Comprised of the City of Boston, foundations, corporations, non-profits, and community organizations, ENB works to support high-quality, accessible ESOL programs; to expand Boston’s capacity to serve English language learners; to test new strategies to reach learners at home, in the community, and at work; to encourage new investment by diverse stakeholders; to heighten awareness about the importance of adult English language learning; and to support the development of a coordinated ESOL system in Boston. “**Learn more about ENB: www.englishfornewbostonians.org, 617-350-5480 x203**