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## Future of Workforce Depends on Ability to Relearn

The success of America's workforce depends on the ability of people to keep learning. This sounds easy enough—until you ask a 38-year-old carpenter who has 20 years on the job if he's willing to go back to school.

John Gaal knows the answer, and it's not always a positive one. As the director of training and workforce development for the Carpenters' District Council of Greater St. Louis and Vicinity, Gaal can appreciate where experienced workers are coming from when they question the need for more training. Part of his job is helping them understand the benefits of updating their skills.

Gaal was one of three panelists who spoke on the subject of "Breaking Barriers: Preparing and Connecting Tomorrow's Workforce" during ACT's annual meeting.



John Gaal

He has helped a variety of companies and workers move "out of the dark ages and into a competitive global environment." Many of those in the skilled trades are discovering that skills they learned on the farm or in high school are now out of date. Gaal cited three case studies of companies in Missouri that have used [WorkKeys](#)<sup>®</sup> to profile incumbent workers, develop requirements for entry-level employees, benchmark the skills needed to be successful at the company, and determine what remediation may be needed. "It's all about bettering the industry," said Gaal.



It's also about helping people, said panelist David Herrala, Michigan Operations learning leader for The Dow Chemical Company. "Walking out of high school and into a job just doesn't happen anymore," he said. People need more advanced skills to compete in a global marketplace.



David Herrala

That's why Dow has developed a strategic and systematic skills initiative in collaboration with WorkKeys that carries out the company's belief: "People are the ultimate competitive advantage." The initiative helps define the skills required of new employees, while "upscaling" the skills of existing workers, said Herrala.

"What better thing can you do for someone in this world than give them new skills and give them the desire to constantly acquire new skills?" he asked.

He said Dow has experienced problems retraining older workers. That's where WorkKeys comes in. It's a powerful approach to helping people build their skills and increase their confidence, said Herrala. "People who complete the assessment feel good about themselves, and people who feel good do a good job."

***"Things are coming together in a unique way that places the NCRC at the heart of everything we do."***

—Keith Bird, chancellor, Kentucky  
Community and Technical College System

Keith Bird, chancellor of the Kentucky Community and Technical College System, has witnessed the positive change that happens when people acquire the skills they need to do their jobs effectively. Kentucky started using WorkKeys in the late 1990s, when the state's Chamber of Commerce called for a common language and assessment among business, education, and government. That led to the development of the Kentucky Employability Certificate (KEC), which was rolled out in 2003 to address two main problems: gaps in the skills of potential workers and the lack of qualified employees.



Keith Bird

The goals of the KEC are threefold:

- To have Kentucky employers recognize the KEC as a meaningful credential
- To have Kentucky citizens recognize the value of the KEC in terms of making themselves more employable
- To develop a pool of certified workers

Thousands of Kentuckians have earned the KEC, which has been the driving force behind Senate Bill 130. The bill calls for the adoption of the ACT<sup>®</sup> test, WorkKeys, and KEC to promote workforce and college readiness in Kentucky's high schools, said Bird.

The [National Career Readiness Certificate™ \(NCRC\)](#) is the "next level" in the process. "With

all the accelerated change that's going on, it's the right place and the right time for the NCRC," said Bird. "Things are coming together in a unique way that places the certificate at the heart of everything we do."

For Kentucky, the National Career Readiness Certificate provides a basic foundation for meeting new skills requirements of the twenty-first century, assists in building a pipeline of workers with portable and meaningful credentials, and leverages regional and state support of a workforce credential.

"In Kentucky, we're replacing an aging workforce with recent college graduates who lack the skills of their predecessors," said Bird. The high schools and two-year colleges in Kentucky are failing to teach students the new skills required in the twenty-first century. As Bird defines them, they are:

- Expert thinking—identify the right problem and choose a solution technique
- Hyper-human skills—discovery, creativity, implementation, influence, and physical action
- Adaptive expertise—go beyond "routine" problem solving and have flexible knowledge to invent ways to solve both familiar problems and new problems

"We must make the case for change," he said. "This is about sustainability of our workforce, our communities, and our incomes. Without change, we will regress."

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