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Writing Skills; Good and bad stand out in the workplace

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Abstract (Document Summary)

"Whether we're talking to college professors, lawyers or anyone who is hiring, we hear, 'We've got the smartest young people we've ever had, but they just can't write well,'" says Gaston Caperton, president of the College Board, a nonprofit organization that administers the SAT and other college entrance exams. Caperton says writing skills are important for people who want to climb the corporate ladder. "For years, we've been hearing the opportunities for writing are shrinking in high schools and colleges. Now we find that the inability to write is having an impact in our workplaces," he says.

Full Text (438 words)

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Janice Weinrick, vice president of real estate operations for the Centre City Development Corp. in San Diego, interviews a lot of job candidates. She knows that not all communication is oral, and asks candidates to write narrative descriptions of their work experiences rather than just provide fact-laden resumes. "Their ability to communicate orally and in writing is vital to our success," Weinrick says.

More job recruiters and interviewers should be following her lead. Corporations spend as much as \$3 billion annually to improve the writing skills of their workers, and poorly written job applications are often tossed out immediately, according to a recent survey of 120 human resources directors. The survey, conducted by the National Commission on Writing for America's Families, Schools and Colleges, found that two-thirds of salaried workers depend upon their writing skills, and an inability to write can severely limit workers as they try to climb into supervisory and management jobs.

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Caperton says it's not enough to have a couple of writing classes in high school and expect people to communicate well. "It's a skill you need to learn early and develop every step along the way through your education. Employers want it because they know good writing requires good thinking," he says.

Good writing is important in the corporate setting, whether it's for operating manuals, company policies, technical reports, e-mails or other things. The importance is underscored by an increasing reliance on e-mail in our work. "Everybody I know is writing much more today than they ever did because of e-mail. Some of it is simply conversational, but much of it is crucial to the way we do business," Caperton says.

Caperton and others hope the new study will call attention to the value of writing skills and will encourage schools and colleges to make certain their graduates have developed the ability to write. Clarity, brevity, accuracy and providing the appropriate detail in a written communication in the workplace also help to make that workplace more efficient and maybe even more productive.

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