



Literacy and you

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The Conference Board of Canada, an independent, non-profit, research organization, does not mince words: “Four out of ten Canadian adults have literacy skills too low to be fully competent in most jobs in our modern economy.”

If you are a regular reader of this column, you are probably not one of those four, but you certainly know them. They are your friends and family, your co-workers or bosses, and they are people who provide services you need.

What is it like to have difficulty reading all but the simplest text, or not at all? Think back, or imagine, a trip to a region where the language is entirely foreign to you. Let’s say they use the same alphabet as English... perhaps it’s French or Italian, and you don’t speak it. You might recognize a word or two or guess at a phrase, but you really do not know what that line says. That’s what it feels like to many people around us.

Literacy matters for all of us, even if we don’t think so. People with high literacy are more likely to vote, and more than twice as likely to participate in community groups as are people with low literacy skills. Literacy affects all aspects of our lives; we just realize the impact it has on people who do not have the same skills.

Literacy is everyone’s issue. What can you do?

A great place to start is to be a lifelong learner yourself. Skills, once acquired, need regular practice. Keep your own skills up to date. Not only will it help you stay current, it will also demonstrate to others the

value you place on learning. Lead by example.

Encouraging others to learn and practice is another good strategy. This includes your own children as you read to them, and with them. Children who have had reading in their lives from early on become readers themselves, propagating the literacy habit.

Speaking out for literacy can be as easy as mentioning the topic at home or the workplace. Better yet, become an advocate for literacy. While volunteering and participating in literacy activities, or making financial or in-kind donations are all excellent ways to support literacy, there are other things you can do.

Look around at your place of work, school or community facility and consider how someone with low literacy skills would navigate the information provided in written form? Are signs and notices clear on the main message? Is there confusion or too much information?

Is the language appropriate to those using the area?

As an employer, encourage your staff to keep learning and to be aware of the issue and how it might affect them. Make literacy a priority where you work, and where you live.

Today, no one can afford the luxury of not reading. Family, work, society... life demands it.

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