

Helping the right employee find the right employer
- by Lloyd Robertson

On paper he had his grade 12. This was not a modified grade 12. It was not a vocational grade 12. This was an academic grade 12 that would qualify him for university. Yet when I tested him he was reading at less than a grade 3 level.

It used to be that students and employers would depend upon the school system to determine career paths. If a person did well in industrial arts it was thought that he or she would be well suited for a career in that direction. If a person had their academic grade 12 it was thought that person would, at least, be able to read and right. Not any more.

Schools are under pressure to pass everyone. Teachers who "fail" too many students are not considered to be good teachers in many northern communities. Lower achieving students may be held back one year but are then promoted on what is commonly known as a "social pass". Their educational program may be modified but there is often no mention of this on the certificate with which they are eventually awarded.

At the same time, employer needs have become more complicated. Employers are looking for specific skills and aptitudes that may not be measured or even taught by the school system. For them it becomes a "hit or miss" exercise. Employers often become frustrated in their attempts to find employees who meet their needs.

Industrial and vocational psychology has filled an increasingly important role in meeting the needs of potential employees and employers. For the individual we can measure achievement (what you know), aptitude (how quickly you can learn things in different areas) and interests (how well you would like doing different jobs). For the employer we can help determine what skills are essential for any specific job and whether potential applicants have the skills and aptitudes to do well in that job.

An extremely useful tool that can help both employers and individuals deciding on their career path is the General Aptitude Test Battery (GATB). The federal government has spent millions in finding out what specific aptitudes are needed for over 5,000 occupations in Canada. Unlike intelligence (IQ) tests that measure one kind of learning ability, the GATB recognizes that people often have strengths or "intelligences" in different areas and that it is important to find a person's strengths rather than simply putting a label on him.

There are dozens of good tests that measure interests and achievement, but the GATB is, in my opinion, the best measure of aptitudes available. It should be part of every vocational psychologist's repertoire.

Whether you are deciding on a career path or whether you are wanting to find employees who will last, shop around when selecting a vocational psychologist. Ensure that he or she has the qualifications and certifications to do the job. The investment in time and money can make all the difference.