



Service Cuisine G.P. Inc is a leader in the food preparation industry.

It offers in-house meal preparation services for grocery stores. The company is well known for its high quality, home-style meals that cost up to 40 per cent less than its competitors.



**I**f you reach for a healthy take-home meal at your local grocery store in Quebec, chances are it's a Service Cuisine G.P. Inc. product.

Located 50 kilometres north of Montreal in the small centre of Blainville, Service Cuisine G.P. Inc. creates everything from macaroni salad to full chicken dinners, with more than 280 recipes to choose from. But unlike pre-packaged meals that are shipped to stores for distribution, Service Cuisine G.P. Inc. meals are prepared fresh in the store by their Service Cuisine G.P. Inc. staff.

Tapping into a growth industry, the company's annual sales have increased by 20 per cent each year, creating a new challenge – finding skilled labour.

"Young adults are not ready to accept entry level jobs," explains Ellen Ferlatte, Director of Operations of Service Cuisine G.P. Inc. "If someone takes hotel or food preparation studies at Cégep, they expect to hold the title of 'chef' on day one."

Instead, Service Cuisine G.P. Inc. turned their attention to unskilled labour, hiring people with little or no experience in the hotel and food preparation industry.

Ferlatte soon realized that although these individuals were ready and willing to work, many lacked the basics necessary for success – such as numeracy, reading and document use skills.

Alain Girard from the Cégep de Lionel Groulx offered a solution. He invited the company to participate in a national project on Essential Skills, to support businesses integrating Essential Skills into their workplace.

Ferlatte was convinced that together they could develop the necessary tools to address the human resource challenges faced by the company.

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Her first step was to visit Human Resources and Social Development Canada's Essential Skills web site ([http://srv108.services.gc.ca/french/general/home\\_e.shtml](http://srv108.services.gc.ca/french/general/home_e.shtml)). It contains hundreds of Essential Skills profiles developed by the federal government based on in-depth research with Canadian workers. The profiles are available online at no charge and are used by industry and educational institutions to develop curriculum and enhance human resource practices.

Using the Essential Skills profile for cooks (NOC 6242) as a starting point, she and Girard created a customized profile that reflected the company's unique needs.

The new profile became the foundation for a formal job description, which created a clear link between what a cook is expected to do and the Essential Skills required to perform the tasks.

According to Ferlatte, this Essential Skills approach makes it much easier to write job postings, create individualized training plans and prepare staff evaluations.

Through the national Essential Skills project, Service Cuisine G.P. Inc. continued to develop job descriptions for other positions, including cook's helper and security. They then turned their attention to skills assessment.

test that identifies specific Essential Skills gaps.

For example, if a cook's helper needs to use fractions to follow a recipe, an Essential Skills assessment tool measures this numeracy skill using documents found in the workplace. If specific skill gaps are identified, they can be addressed through targeted training.

Working together, Girard and Ferlatte created a tool specific to Service Cuisine G.P. Inc. that allows them to compare the Essential Skills needed to do the job with the employee's skills.

The company now requires all new employees to complete the evaluation, which targets the Essential Skills required to perform the job successfully. The results serve as a basis for an individualized training plan.



**“While the introduction of an Essential Skills framework requires time, Ferlatte says it has been an excellent investment.”**

“You must assess the employee's individual needs as of day one in order to create a customized training plan that will address the needs of the company,” says Ferlatte.

At Girard's suggestion, Service Cuisine G.P. Inc. encouraged several sub-contractors to take TOWES (Test of Workplace Essential Skills), an assessment tool created to measure Essential Skills in three domains: numeracy, reading and document use (for more information, visit [www.TOWES.ca](http://www.TOWES.ca)). They could immediately see the value of a

Ferlatte and Girard continue to work together to integrate Essential Skills at Service Cuisine G.P. Inc. They plan to expand the job description series and develop new recruitment tools.

While the introduction of an Essential Skills framework requires time, Ferlatte says it has been an excellent investment.

“Time invested is well worth it and, in the long run, cost savings will be achieved.”