



# Phillips Staffing Finds the Formula for Matching Workers with Client Company Positions

## THE ORGANIZATION:

**Phillips Staffing**

**Greenville, South Carolina**

## THE CHALLENGE:

- » Ensure that workers placed at client companies are matched with the skill requirements of each position

## KEY COMPONENTS:

- » Perform job profiling by ACT-authorized, on-staff profilers to develop detailed task lists and conduct task and skill analyses for positions at client companies in upstate South Carolina
- » Offer a training curriculum to help individuals prepare for workplace skills assessments
- » Provide on-site testing for registered Career Readiness Certificates (CRC), credentials that are used across all sectors of the economy and certify the following skills:
  - > Problem solving
  - > Critical thinking
  - > Reading and using work-related text
  - > Applying information from workplace documents to solve problems
  - > Applying mathematical reasoning to work-related problems
  - > Setting up and performing work-related mathematical calculations
  - > Locating, synthesizing, and applying information that is presented graphically
  - > Comparing, summarizing, and analyzing information presented in multiple, related graphics

- » Offer additional WorkKeys® testing as defined by specific job profiles

## THE RESULTS:

- » More than 35 profiles have been completed by Phillips Staffing profilers for client companies
- » Itron, a leading provider of energy and water resource management solutions for utilities around the globe, now requires Career Readiness Certificates from all applicants for permanent positions at its manufacturing facility in West Union, South Carolina

## COMPANY OVERVIEW

Founded in 1968, S.B. Phillips Company is the parent company of Phillips Staffing. A full-service agency, Phillips Staffing uses a consultative approach with client companies to offer staffing, payroll management, professional placement, and human resources consulting services. Headquartered in Greenville, South Carolina, Phillips Staffing has 10 additional offices in the state and one in Northwest Georgia. The firm's stated commitment is to provide employers and job seekers alike with the highest standards of service and partnership.

## THE CHALLENGE

When Ed Parris, now president of the Staffing Group at Phillips, joined the company about five years ago, he suggested the implementation of job profiling, WorkKeys testing, and Career Readiness Certificates to his new colleagues. Parris learned about Career Readiness Certificates as chairman of the local Workforce Investment Board, and his experience as a recruiter for a large tool manufacturer taught him about the challenge of assessing employees' workplace skills. "I felt that

WorkKeys provided the best kind of common language between education and industry I'd seen," Parris recalls. "It seemed that there has been a long-term struggle to get the education community to truly understand the workplace skills necessary in today's manufacturing environment. WorkKeys really addresses that gap and helps both parties communicate about what skill levels are needed to be successful. It was truly a 'bingo' moment for me."

At Phillips, Parris suggested that this same level of communication is essential for a staffing agency in serving clients. "If we know that an hourly line worker at a particular client company really needs a Bronze-level Certificate to do the job, then it is ideal if we send that company only those workers who have already proven their workplace skill levels at that level or higher," says Parris. "The match is more likely to be a good one for the worker and for the employer."

In September 2010, Phillips Staffing partnered with Greenville Works to launch a WorkKeys pilot program. Greenville Works is a partnership of local, state, and federal organizations working together to help new and existing businesses in Greenville County meet their workforce and business growth needs. These organizations share the view that ACT's Work Readiness System—which includes job analysis, assessments, training and curriculum, and certification—is an effective tool to upgrade the skills of the local workforce and benefit economic development.

## IMPLEMENTATION

In the fall of 2010, Phillips deployed two ACT-authorized job profilers to work directly with employers to analyze specific positions. Profiling involves a focus group process to gather job task and WorkKeys skill information from job incumbents. A report is produced with a customized task list and identified skill levels related to specific work examples.

In October 2011, Phillips Staffing was named a full-service WorkKeys Solutions Provider, allowing the firm to administer WorkKeys assessments at Phillips Staffing offices or on-site at an employer's location.

"What sets us apart as a staffing agency is our consultative approach," says Parris. "We tour a prospective client's plant or business; we do risk assessments; we offer as many value-added services as we can. The WorkKeys program is certainly one of those. We have evidence that this innovation has helped with safety, turnover, productivity, and quality issues. We're a big believer in what this can mean for our clients' success." Parris reports that the system has improved almost every important metric for Phillips Staffing

and its clients. "It is nationally validated, and the success stories from diverse business settings are remarkable."

Parris continues, "Too many companies have relied on a promote-from-within approach based solely on work history and attendance. Individuals are promoted who just don't have the skills to succeed. The ACT Work Readiness System gives us the data and the tools to establish measurable skills criteria, and it gives workers an objective idea of what they need to succeed."

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— Ed Parris, President, Staffing Groups, Phillips Staffing

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With profiling services and testing in place, Phillips Staffing began serving a broad variety of employers and client companies, including tool manufacturing, plastic injection molding, sportswear manufacturing, and chemical companies.

Ideally, the process begins with profiling the specific jobs to be filled. Phillips' workforce readiness director, Beverly Deal, reports that the workers involved in the profiling process seem to enjoy the fact that their employer really wants to know, in great detail, what it takes to do a job well. "They take the focus group process very seriously and often are surprised at the amount of information in the final report. Our client companies appreciate the fact that hiring can be a more standardized, objective process, and they often report a positive impact on their bottom line in terms of reduced turnover and higher productivity from new hires."

## RESULTS AT ITRON, INC.

Itron is a leading provider of energy and water resource management solutions for nearly 8,000 utilities around the globe. With nearly 9,000 employees in 130 countries, Itron empowers utilities to manage energy and water resources responsibly and efficiently.

Itron's plant in West Union, South Carolina, employs more than 750 full-time employees to design and build meters to measure electricity use. This Oconee County facility

employs about 450 full-time Itron hourly production workers and an additional 300 Phillips Staffing employees. These contingent workers may spend a few weeks at Itron or stay as long as two years, depending on workflow demand. Contingent workers are not required to hold a Career Readiness Certificate, but any individual wishing to apply for a full-time position with Itron must earn a CRC.

The 35 job positions profiled at Itron represent 100 percent of the hourly production positions at the West Union location. Phillips Staffing personnel completed 22 of the 35 profiles for Itron.

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*“Itron believes WorkKeys is a valuable tool not only for our employees, but also in workforce development and employment.”*

— Sue Gray, Human Resources Manager, Itron, Inc.

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The next implementation goal will be to use WorkKeys assessments for internal job openings. To bid for a posted opening, employees must have the skill levels required by the position profile to apply. “Researching and documenting information on all hourly positions is vital for Itron when planning staff development needs,” says Deal. “And it is also invaluable for us as a staffing agency when we can be confident we are sending candidates to Itron with the necessary skills to succeed.”

“Itron believes WorkKeys is a valuable tool not only for our employees, but also in workforce development and employment,” says Sue Gray, Itron human resources manager. “Hourly positions are among the hardest to hire. We may know an applicant’s work history and that they have manufacturing experience, but we also need to know whether they have the skill sets to perform the jobs at our plant. This program has given us that knowledge. The employees provided by Phillips Staffing working on-site are aware that we require Certificates as part of the hiring process and have chosen to document their skills by taking the assessments.”

Brooke Dobbins, a senior human resources business partner at Itron’s West Union plant, adds, “It may be surprising, but this has really been a good morale booster for our workers. They invested training time to prepare for the assessments, they tested, they achieved their Certificates,

and they take a lot of pride in their scores. The confidence they have gained has greatly outweighed any reluctance they may have had with the process.”

In 2012, Itron expects to begin using the system for full-time employees bidding on positions, and one of Itron’s Minnesota plants is beginning to explore the use of assessments and ACT’s National Career Readiness Certificate for their workers. Gray believes the West Union plant already has earned distinction as one of the first companies in the state to have a high percentage of workers with a CRC. “We look forward to celebrating that accomplishment.”

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## NEXT STEPS

Phillips Staffing is committed to continued use and advocacy of the system. According to Parris, “Greenville Works has brought a lot of key parties together—economic development, technical schools, high schools, United Way, and others—to address workforce issues together.” This is a model that Parris would like to see implemented across the state. “I have to give kudos to Greenville Works,” he says. “The open forum and broad cooperation they’ve created is really making a difference.”

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## RECOMMENDATIONS

Parris and Deal believe that staffing agencies across the nation can benefit from the ACT Work Readiness System. Parris concludes, “It’s a tool for providing the best available workforce to our customers, and it also says a lot about us that we have profilers on staff, offer testing at our offices and on-site at client companies, and are committed to being the best service provider we can be.”

Learn more at [WWW.ACT.ORG/WORKFORCE](http://WWW.ACT.ORG/WORKFORCE)

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