

Jonathan spoke very little English when he moved to the United States from Vietnam five years ago. As an employee at Horizon Tool Inc., he struggled to communicate effectively with his supervisors and coworkers. When his employer partnered with Reading Connections this summer to provide English classes to employees, Jonathan immediately signed up.

"I have trouble understanding people," he said. "When someone asks for an item, I need to know what they are asking. It is important for me to understand people, for my job."



Jonathan is just one of the 22 employees enrolled in English literacy classes taught by Reading Connections at Horizon Tool in Greensboro. These classes are unique because they are held on-site at the students' place of employment during business hours. Employees with limited English proficiency meet for one hour, four times a week with a Reading Connections tutor. Students learn vocabulary, practice speaking, and complete a variety of contextualized literacy activities designed to improve their ability to communicate in and out of the workplace.

"Horizon Tool places an emphasis on creating a culture of family values and personal development," said Laura Hutchison, HR/administrative manager at Horizon Tool. "Reading Connections classes provide an opportunity for employees to improve communication skills and confidence in those skills to effectively communicate with co-workers and in personal community interaction. Horizon Tool cares about employees' success at work and in all areas of their lives and strives to find ways to further this success."



H'Wil has worked at Horizon Tool for more than twenty-five years. Between raising a family and working full-time, she never found the time to attend English classes.

"The class is a good tool," said H'Wil. "I read and speak better. I even learned some Spanish from my classmates," she said with a laugh. While she admits that learning English at her age is not easy, she is excited about having class at her place of employment. "I need to learn to speak English better, and it is fun to learn with all of them," she said, pointing at her co-workers.

The students are not the only ones who have seen an improvement in their abilities to communicate since classes started. The management team at Horizon Tool has noticed a difference in their employees too.

"Employees are more engaged in their day to day activities," said Scott Mercer, director of operations. "The teachings have allowed the students to become more involved in our new MRP program, making them more knowledgeable in their roles."



The number of working-age immigrants in the United States is projected to increase from 33.9 million in 2015 to 38.5 million by 2035. About half of all immigrants age 5 and older have limited English proficiency, according to a [2017 Pew Research Center Report](#). The growth in working immigrants with limited English proficiency means that many employers may be investigating workplace literacy programs like ours to improve communication and productivity in the workplace.

Reading Connections hopes to partner with other employers in our community to provide individualized English instruction to immigrant workers. If you or someone you know is interested in partnering with us, please contact us at info@readingconnections.org or (336) 230-2223.