

Some job seekers come with gold stars

By [James Thorner](#), Times Staff Writer

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Who's been to a department store, inquired about a 25 percent discount and watched the flummoxed clerk mangle the math?

"Twenty-five percent off that \$100 jacket is...is...is... oh, just take it for \$55."

Now imagine legions of the numerically confused filling the state's nuclear power plants, carpenters' benches and bank teller windows.

Can anyone say "Homer Simpson?"

The state is in the first year of a work place credentialing service called Florida Ready to Work. As program director Colleen Englert stressed about a gazillion times during a briefing last week for Tampa business people, the service is free.

Ready to Work assesses future employees, often high schoolers taking vocational classes, in three areas: applied mathematics (those pesky percentages again), reading for information (making head and tails of manuals and memos) and finding information (deciphering charts, graphs and maps).

Job seekers who pass the test can essentially flash a Ready to Work badge signed by Gov. Charlie Crist whenever they apply for a position.

Englert considers the certifications a supplement to whatever private testing firms use.

A high school diploma is no longer sufficient preparation for the job market. In the 1950s, 40 percent of Florida jobs required skills. These days 90 percent do.

Ready to Work assigns three grades to test takers: bronze, silver and gold. Bronze certification suggests the employee can ace 35 percent of Florida jobs. Gold certificate holders qualify for about 90 percent of jobs.

The agency also offers an optional "work habits" assessments. Qualities measured include attitude, speaking skills, time management and cooperation.

Englert summed up the latter evaluations thusly: "Lose the nose ring."

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