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**Local Businesses Gear Up for Spanish Speakers**

( Air Date: 7/14/2005 )

Local businesses are also preparing for the potential influx of hispanics to the St. Joseph area.

A national program brought local teaches businesses the tools they need to communicate in a foreign language.

Mark Drag and fellow members of the St. Joseph Commerce Bank branches leave the office to enter the world of speaking spanish.

"When customers come to the bank speaking spanish, hopefully I will be able to help them a little more and make them feel comfortable," Mark Drag, commercial loan associate, says. That's where nationally-recognized Command Spanish helps.

"Command Spanish teaches work-specific phrases. Each job has a specific set of phrases," Peggy Ellis, business adn industry trainer at Western Institute, says.

Commerce Bank is the first of many local businesses gearing up for the potential influx of hispanics to the St. Joe area. They say just knowing the basics to communicate can open many doors.

"We already have spanish-speaking custoemrs that are hard to understand. If we can make it easier for them to communicate with us and vice versa, it'll just make our job easier as well," Shanda Parrish, Commerce Bank branch manager, says.

Bankers say it's easy communicating in English, but when someone doesn't speak your language, the communication barrier creates a customer service barrier. Command Spanish is teaching bankers specific phrases to get specific answers.

"We teach them to ask specifics to get yes or no answers, not explanations. Business personnel won't understand lengthy explanations, but they can get the job done with yes or no questions," Pat Cathey, spanish teacher, says.

Although learning a new language comes with its fair share of frustrations, bankers say it could prove to be a savvy business move.

"We always want new customers, and we want to be able to make them feel welcome. By learning another language, we hope to make it easier to communicate," Emil Sechter, president of St. Joseph Commerce Banks, says.

For businesses wanting a customized command of spanish, call Peggy Ellis at Western Institute at 816.271.4116.

Missouri Western also offers spanish language classes for people wanting to learn conversational phrases.

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