



Apprenticeships: A tried and true concept reemerges

By Dylan Edgell

Apprenticeships are making a comeback. These somewhat informal programs used to be the primary method of learning a technical or vocational skill but fell out of favor to more formal paths of education. As college tuition prices continue to climb, apprenticeships have been gaining in popularity as an alternative to college or technical school by allowing individuals to learn valuable skills, gain real-world experience and earn money at the same time.

I spoke with Patty Methvin, workforce administrator for the Northwest Arkansas Economic Development District, to learn more about apprenticeship programs in that region of the state. “Programs like these are not new,” she said. “We’re bringing back an old model that wasn’t broken.” Methvin shared some insights into the types of people who enter apprenticeship programs and what these programs look like in practice.

There are many different paths to becoming an apprentice and there is no “average person” that enters an apprenticeship program. Some individuals may be coming directly out of high school and looking to establish a career for the first time. Others may be currently employed but have a desire to upskill or change their careers. Some may be dislocated workers looking to start

their careers in a new field. Whichever way someone seeks out a program like this, they are likely to find an apprenticeship that fits their needs.

Apprenticeship programs can vary in structure based on the needs of the industry and the company. Apprentices may work part time or full time while receiving training for their role both on the job and outside of their working hours. While the structure of the program may vary, the end result of the program is the same, and potential apprentices should seek a program that best fits their needs.

As apprenticeship programs take hold in Arkansas, here are a few tips to ensure that an apprenticeship program is effective at attracting talent and impacting your community.

Educate your business partners

For potential apprentices, programs that enable them to receive training for a new career while still earning money during the process are a win-win. For businesses, this may be a slightly harder sell, but there are some real advantages to using this model for recruiting new employees. Programs like these allow businesses to employ individuals who are willing to educate

themselves for a long-term career in their field and are able to take advantage of the approved outside partners providing valuable training outside of their normal work. This relationship-building through the apprenticeship program allows employers the unique opportunity to train an employee from scratch to ensure that the needs of the employer are wholly met. It's also important for both the apprentice and the employer to understand that during an apprenticeship program, the apprentice is still considered an employee and they are held to the same standards as traditional employees.

Utilize your business environment to design your program

Apprenticeship programs are driven by the needs of employers in your area. When designing these programs, be mindful of the business environment and include them in the process to ensure their needs are being met. It's also important to apply the apprenticeship model to new fields. Apprenticeships have historically been focused on traditional technical fields such as plumbing or welding, but new programs are starting to focus on emerging fields like information technology. Exploring these new fields expands the employment potential of future apprentices.

Seek opportunities to be inclusive

Apprenticeship programs offer a unique opportunity to include those in the workforce who may have been left out previously. Apprenticeships can be a powerful tool to remove barriers to employment, including dislocation or the special needs of an individual. One example is a program currently being implemented at a Fayetteville bakery that teaches individuals on the autism spectrum the basics of food service. The Rockin' Baker Academy program at the Rockin' Baker teaches transferable skills in the culinary industry and addresses a need for an underserved community.

Apprenticeship programs are an effective use of time for both the apprentice and the employer. Having a trained workforce is a vital part of the human infrastructure that makes a community attractive to prospective businesses. Laying the groundwork through apprenticeship programs shows that your community is ready for the future by training the next generation of the Arkansas workforce.



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