

Building a Better Workforce

January 2014

Dan Bell

There is so much being done in the area of workforce development, yet in some cases, businesses are still indicating that the system of preparing the workforce isn't producing the results.

My most recent (2013) personal experience is related to creating an internship program for a local Technology Consortium.

In one case, we had a zero for twelve success rate on intern candidates. We actually had to shift to a different school where the results were better, though nothing to write home about.

Examples of the deficiencies are:

1. Failure to follow instructions: ALL intern candidates were asked to supply resumes, but only about 30% did so.
2. Too much textbook, not enough practical skills: An IT intern candidate could not identify "the router" in the IT equipment room.
3. Lack of preparation: An intern came into the interview and asked the company owner to tell him about the company.
4. Not dressed for success: Some showed up dressed unprofessionally.

There are plenty of examples out there.

What are the dynamics that might be occurring that contribute to this condition?

College Process Auto Pilot?

Most colleges are indicating that they have programs. However, to what extent are the programs that effective?

Are the schools managing a closed loop system where success of interns is measured (both short term and longer term)?

Are the businesses participating in the preparation of workforce effectively via feedback?

Are the schools accepting that feedback and modifying programs appropriately?

Business Process Auto Pilot?

Some companies are simply expecting higher results from the college system, but perhaps are not contributing to the process for improvements.

When businesses are at a point that they are considering uprooting and relocation to a better workforce market, we might want to adapt a regional sense and jump up, get a meeting at the college and stand on a desk until someone is listening.

Additionally, we should be taking an active role in creating an improved program.

Clearly, there is a call for improvement with business, college and students sharing culpability.

Let's consider some opportunities to move the needle in the right direction.

The 21st century business models are different from before. Let's consider an Internship Program Overhaul.

Things to consider:

Virtual vs. Physical

Workers are often times working "virtually". What this means is that businesses are in some cases not investing as much in "brick and mortar" physical presence. This could possibly translate to insufficient space for interns to work in. This contributes to lack of scalability for any internship program.

Legalities

There are many legalities and tax ramifications that could be prohibitive to small and medium sized businesses adding interns. This contributes to lack of scalability for any internship program.

Financials

Effective programs should be intended to assist with many, not few. Yet it is a financial burden to suggest that businesses (alone) support the financial element of effective internship programs. This contributes to lack of scalability for any internship program.

Efficiencies

Businesses often times don't have the resources needed to manage the internship resources. This contributes to lack of scalability for any internship program.

Changing Business Needs

At least in technology, the world moves fast and there are a lot of changes.

Any workforce development program MUST have built in flexibility and adaptability to conform to those changing dynamics. To not adapt, contributes to lack of scalability for any internship program.

Virtual 21st Century Internship Model

Let's consider a new and scalable model for preparing our workforce with real world practical skills. It requires a newly defined partnership between business and education.

Possible Goals:

1. Create better ties between education and business to best prepare workforce for employability.
2. Impact maximum amount of students' possible (scalability).
3. Create a program with closed loop measurements of results.

Ideas:

1. Create a list of participating schools and companies in Hampton Roads.
2. Schools would organize participating students in a Virtual Internship Program.
3. Schools would provide a physical place (intern workspace), where they can work on programs or projects
4. If projects are real for the company, interns would be paid no less than minimum wage. If projects are simulated, it could be considered pure education, and not paid.
5. Projects could be hybrids from virtual intern space at colleges or a mix of on-site at business location as needed.
6. High performing students could be a "hiring pool" for the future needs of the company.
7. Businesses would provide some level of college on-site mentoring (hard and soft skills they're looking for and differentiation opportunities).
8. Businesses could provide some workplace tours and conversations with existing employees about what it's like to work at the company.

Think of the possibilities if we truly had business and education working in unison to create real-world, practical application programs to assist in our region's workforce development.

Traditional efforts have been great thus far, but it's a new world from many different perspectives.

-END-

Dan Bell is the president of the Hampton Roads Innovation Collaborative, former president of Future of Hampton Roads and Canon Information Technology Services, former Senior Global VP of 3Com and US Robotics, and an active regional advocate. Dan is at danbell@hric.email or 757-373-6517.