

APPRENTICESHIP BUSINESS ENGAGEMENT

STRATEGIES IN ACTION

Understanding the theory of effective business engagement is one thing, but it is another matter to do it well. This document can help. Three scenarios illustrate ways that effective business engagement strategies can be applied to get better results when working with businesses on apprenticeship. These scenarios are based on real challenges and solutions that organizations promoting apprenticeships – such as state agencies, colleges, workforce development organizations, and others – are effectively working through every day. Related Questions for Action for each scenario will help you apply these strategies.

SCENARIO 1

THE CHALLENGE: ARTICULATING THE VALUE OF APPRENTICESHIP FOR BUSINESS

A community college develops an innovative partnership with a statewide information technology (IT) association to help them expand apprenticeship as a way to address IT workforce challenges. While this partnership helps the community college business services staff get their foot in the door for meetings with IT employers, they struggle to articulate the value proposition – what makes apprenticeship attractive to companies – and close the deal.

A BETTER APPROACH

Learning how the apprenticeship model relates to the current hiring and training processes of businesses allows the business services staff for the community college to begin articulating the value of apprenticeship in the language employers understand. When meeting with IT employers, business services staff translate components of the apprenticeship model into the language of business. For example, instead of using apprenticeship terms like “related technical instruction,” they ask employers about their onboarding process and what new employees learn. Instead of talking about “work processes,” they ask companies about their skill needs. Instead of “wage progression,” they ask how and when employees earn merit raises. By speaking in business terms and demonstrating an understanding of an employer’s workforce needs, business services staff are able to articulate how apprenticeship can address these needs, from hiring and training to promotion and retention.

Once IT employers see how apprenticeship relates to their current hiring and training processes, the business services staff talk to the companies about another benefit of apprenticeship – it can help them enhance and formalize what they already do to recruit, train, and retain their employees. For instance, once developed, the apprenticeship training becomes repeatable. Every new hire has someone to show them the ropes, but identifying mentors under the apprenticeship model clarifies relationships and expectations. Companies spend money on training, but under apprenticeship, training costs are offset by recruitment savings, lower initial wages, and reduced turnover.

BUSINESS ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES

SPEAK THE LANGUAGE OF BUSINESS TO DEMYSTIFY APPRENTICESHIP.

DEMONSTRATE HOW **APPRENTICESHIP FORMALIZES WHAT COMPANIES ALREADY DO**, BUT WITH BETTER RESULTS.

ADD VALUE TO EACH BUSINESS INTERACTION.

SCENARIO 1 (continued)

Typical business practices dictate that pay raises are standard, but apprenticeship ties them to clearly-articulated skill and competency levels. Helping companies connect the dots between their employee development processes and the components of apprenticeship, and then demonstrating the value of formalizing their processes through apprenticeship programs, can help companies see the value of apprenticeship.

Finally, business services staff look for opportunities to build customer relationships by adding value for employers whenever possible. For example, they offered IT companies assistance in developing apprenticeship standards for help desk positions. Through this process, one company saw the standards' usefulness for measuring competencies and assessing effectiveness at various stages of training. The company asked for help to go a step further and define "basic," "competent," and "expert" levels for various competencies. By doing so, the community college business services staff added tremendous value for this company, building a stronger relationship with them in the process.

QUESTIONS FOR ACTION

- ✓ DO YOU USE BUSINESS LANGUAGE TO DEMYSTIFY APPRENTICESHIP AND ARTICULATE ITS BENEFITS?
- ✓ HOW CAN YOU RELATE APPRENTICESHIP TO A BUSINESS'S CURRENT HIRING, TRAINING, AND RETENTION PROCESSES?
- ✓ WHAT ARE WAYS YOU CAN ADD VALUE FOR YOUR BUSINESS CLIENT IN ORDER TO BUILD THE CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIP?

SCENARIO 2

THE CHALLENGE: OVERCOMING APPREHENSIONS ABOUT APPRENTICESHIP

A business engagement team at a local American Job Center thinks apprenticeship can help local companies struggling to find skilled talent. However, they have difficulty overcoming companies' fears about paperwork and compliance burdens, in part because team members do not fully understand apprenticeship benefits and requirements.

A BETTER APPROACH

Knowing that area businesses are having so much trouble finding job candidates that they are beginning to offshore jobs, the business engagement team understands that apprenticeship might be a solution. To learn more, they partner with their state apprenticeship office to host a series of training sessions for the business engagement team and other staff at the American Job Center. They also visit and talk with a few employers with apprenticeship programs to better understand how apprenticeship meets their talent needs.

The team quickly realizes that apprenticeship can fill talent gaps because it enables companies to tap into a much wider pool of hard-working candidates willing to be trained. Apprenticeship also allows companies to pay entry level apprentices at the low end of the scale and invest the savings into the training and mentoring that will grow employees' talents to perfectly meet company requirements. Now when they reach out to businesses, the team understands and can help businesses make this paradigm shift in their thinking about the prospective candidate pool too.

BUSINESS ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES

UNDERSTAND THE TALENT PROBLEMS

A BUSINESS IS FACING AND HOW APPRENTICESHIP CAN SOLVE THEM.

IDENTIFY AND ADDRESS BUSINESS CONCERNS THAT MAY STAND IN THE WAY OF **ESTABLISHING APPRENTICESHIPS.**

ADD VALUE BY SHIFTING ADMINISTRATIVE RESPONSIBILITIES FROM THE EMPLOYER TO AN INTERMEDIARY.

SCENARIO 2 (continued)

Even so, employers still express apprehension over paperwork and state compliance requirements. The business engagement staff looks into the administrative requirements for registered apprenticeship programs – tasks that include registering the employer into an approved registered apprenticeship program, providing access to state and federal registration tools to record new apprentices, and on-going monitoring and review of the program. They learn that an intermediary organization sometimes acts as the sponsor of an apprenticeship program to ease the burden for businesses of handling these responsibilities. This is particularly relevant for helping small businesses that do not have the personnel capacity to sponsor a program. Since these requirements are similar to the work the local workforce board already does for other training programs, the board decides that it will address company concerns by becoming the apprenticeship sponsor – to show by example that paperwork, dealing with the government, and administrative requirements do not have to be difficult or burdensome.

SCENARIO 3

THE CHALLENGE: CONVERTING INTEREST INTO APPRENTICESHIPS

A state Economic Development Agency wants to partner with large companies that could make significant commitments to expanding apprenticeship but does not know how to sustain momentum to convert interest into apprenticeships. Their usual methods of identifying business customers and marketing workforce development programs are not working, particularly in light of company concerns about the perceived costs of apprenticeship.

A BETTER APPROACH

This state agency initiates a different approach by targeting specific industries and offering apprenticeship as a viable, cost-effective approach to talent development. The business services team focuses on two high-growth industries in the region – healthcare and IT – and begins researching major employers to identify companies with the greatest numbers of job openings. The team then focuses on these companies with a demonstrated skill need and takes a deeper dive to better understand the companies' needs.

Next, the business services team:

- Creates spreadsheets to track job titles and job descriptions, capturing the skill demands for each.
- Looks for the positions that can be apprenticed, especially noting those which are labeled “entry level” or “junior.”
- Researches unfamiliar terms and technologies in the healthcare and IT sectors to understand company lingo and skill demands and better identify workforce training pain points.

QUESTIONS FOR ACTION

- ✓ WHAT CAN YOU DO TO GAIN A DEEPER UNDERSTANDING OF APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAMS AND RELATED REQUIREMENTS, SO THAT YOU CAN TALK MORE FLUENTLY WITH EMPLOYERS ABOUT APPRENTICESHIP?
- ✓ HOW DO COMPANIES IN YOUR COMMUNITY PERCEIVE APPRENTICESHIP? ARE THERE CONCERNS ABOUT APPRENTICESHIP THAT YOU CAN ADDRESS OR ALLEVIATE?
- ✓ WHAT INTERMEDIARIES MIGHT BE WILLING TO SERVE AS SPONSORS AND TAKE ON THE ADMINISTRATIVE RESPONSIBILITIES FOR EMPLOYERS?

BUSINESS ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES

USE RESEARCH TO IDENTIFY BUSINESSES

WITH WORKFORCE CHALLENGES APPRENTICESHIP CAN SOLVE.

PREPARE FOR THE FIRST CONVERSATION BY UNDERSTANDING HIGH DEMAND JOBS AND THEIR RELATED SKILL NEEDS.

FOCUS ON FACTS THAT BUSINESSES CARE ABOUT, SUCH AS THEIR PAIN POINTS AND COSTS AND BENEFITS, TO **DEMONSTRATE THE VALUE OF APPRENTICESHIP.**

SCENARIO 3 (continued)

This preparation gives the business services team a comprehensive understanding of how apprenticeship could effectively address a company's workforce challenges, even before they reach out. It enables team members to demonstrate from the first contact that they understand and want to work with a company to help them recruit, train, and retain a skilled workforce. For companies that decide to try apprenticeship, the spreadsheet also becomes a useful tool to identify skills and competencies and develop related instruction and on-the-job learning outlines which align with job descriptions – steps that sometimes scare companies away.

To help address employer concerns about apprenticeship program costs, the state agency also conducts a cost-benefit analysis to help companies explore why they might want to use apprenticeship. Questions are asked that allow a business to compare their current approach (e.g., recruitment, screening, supervision, higher wages, unfilled positions, retention rate) compared against the costs of hiring through apprenticeship (e.g., lower recruitment costs, lower initial wages, fewer unfilled positions, higher retention rate). The business services team also factors in available state resources, including help through the workforce system, to screen candidates and provide work readiness training and related instruction. Hard cost comparison figures that speak to a company's bottom line help demonstrate the value of apprenticeship.

QUESTIONS FOR ACTION

- ✓ WHAT TYPE OF RESEARCH DO YOU CONDUCT ON IN DEMAND OCCUPATIONS AND SKILLS TO IDENTIFY POTENTIAL BUSINESSES CUSTOMERS FOR APPRENTICESHIP?
- ✓ ARE THERE ANY IN-DEMAND TECHNOLOGIES OR SKILLS THAT YOU NEED TO BETTER UNDERSTAND IN ORDER TO TALK FLUENTLY WITH A COMPANY ABOUT ITS WORKFORCE NEEDS?
- ✓ COULD A COST-BENEFIT ANALYSIS CHART OR SOME OTHER TOOL HELP BUSINESSES UNDERSTAND THE APPRENTICESHIP MODEL AND THE BENEFITS FOR THEM?

LOOKING FOR MORE RESOURCES AND TOOLS ON APPRENTICESHIP BUSINESS ENGAGEMENT?

VISIT

Apprenticeship Business Engagement Tools
<https://apprenticeshipusa.workforcegps.org/resources/2018/05/11/17/01/Apprenticeship-Business-Engagement-Tools>

Apprenticeship Community of Practice
<https://apprenticeshipusa.workforcegps.org/>



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DEPARTMENT OF LABOR
OFFICE OF APPRENTICESHIP