



Laury Ferguson
Assistant Director of Apprenticeship

Apprenticeship. It's the Smart Choice...It's What's Good for Business!

How do we prepare our workforce for jobs in the 21st century? How can we possibly compete with our competitors if our skilled workforce pool is dwindling? How can we possibly continue to meet the needs of our customers that demand higher output with a shorter lead time, while providing a quality product that we take pride in delivering? How do we keep our customers from going elsewhere? How do we replace our skilled workers as they prepare to retire?

These are the questions that plague many businesses across the U.S. and alone these businesses are unable to solve today's skill shortages or prevent new shortages tomorrow. However, by building partnerships with workforce development, education, and government they have the resources and ability to create on-the-job training programs that increase the skillsets of our workers and prepare them to step into skilled trades.

Businesses turn to Registered Apprenticeship (RA) programs because of the difficulties they face with sourcing and recruiting skilled workers that meet both job and education minimum requirements. Within the apprenticeship framework, businesses have the flexibility to adapt their On-the-Job Learning (OJL) program to their specific needs. The business structures their OJL plan and curriculum to meet their individual needs defined by them, the experts!

For a RA Program to be successful, the business needs to believe that the value outweighs any type of risk or costs associated with the program. There are three main metrics they may use to measure the value of having apprentices on their team.

Production: Businesses gain the value of output the apprentice delivers during their OJL as they gain knowledge and proficiency. Once an apprentice completes the program, the value can be measured through an increase in output, quality, and reduction of errors. Apprenticeships provide workers with both practical skills and an understanding of fundamental principles. They can be cross trained in different areas and perform a wide variety of skilled tasks.

Workforce: Being an apprentice provides an individual with a future and a career...it's not "just a job." Knowing the employer is investing in them and committing to their success builds a bond of loyalty between the company and employee, and also serves as a motivator to stay rooted in their communities. The result can be seen through the reduction of turnover, decreased hiring costs, improved recruitment, and increased pipeline of skilled employees.

Soft Skills: Apprenticeships lead to improved employee engagement, shared knowledge, greater problem-solving ability, flexibility to perform a wide variety of tasks, and a reduced need for supervision.

There are certain decisions that are made with a RA Program that can greatly affect overall costs, benefits, and design of the program (length of program, wages for the apprentice and mentor, program management, OJL curriculum/equipment). One factor that can affect start-up and ongoing costs is whether a company decides to sponsor their own program or work with other businesses, Department of Labor, and/or a not for profit agency. Having an external sponsor, like MACNY, that can assist with managing the administrative functions and sourcing grant funding opportunities, certainly has its advantages and helps keep costs down while increasing program success.

The key to sustaining and having a successful apprenticeship program is to balance the interests of the employer, the apprentices, and the incumbent workforce to see the benefits. The quality of training provided in an apprenticeship results in a prepared, highly skilled, diligent workforce. Additionally, an apprenticeship works to close the skill gap and is the answer to the question, "How do we..."

Simply put, "Apprenticeship. It's the Smart Choice...It's What's Good for Business!"