

H-1B TECHHIRE

SUCCESS STORY

A FUTURE TO BE PROUD OF

Connecting TechHire IT Job Candidates With Good Jobs

ABSTRACT

This resource aims to help those trying to connect TechHire participants who do not fit the ideal candidate profile with IT jobs in large companies. Employ Milwaukee's TechHire initiative has had employment placement success with large national companies, which historically prefer to hire young, four-year college graduates with degrees in computer science.

INTRODUCTION

For many companies, the ideal information technology (IT) job candidate—regardless of position—is a 22-year-old graduate of a four-year computer science program. However, IT job seekers who have completed comprehensive IT skills training, have earned industry-recognized

Employ Milwaukee contracts with the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development to provide front-line case management services and job preparation workshops, while the local technical college provides a 12-credit certificate program. Partnering with the college has generated cross-referrals, and TechHire students have access to a unique statewide job posting system for employers that want to reach out to students of the program. This placement resource combined with Employ Milwaukee's robust business services approach and sector-specific industry advisory boards gives students a leg up in their job search. TechHire graduates seeking work in neighboring counties can work with the business services teams of the local workforce development boards thanks to contracts with Employ Milwaukee. As part of a large, business-led TechHub, Employ Milwaukee helps educate employers on alternative training and employment pathways and connects TechHire graduates to job opportunities.

certifications, and have hands-on experience are often considered as qualified or even more qualified than graduates of a four-year college. IT job seekers who have taken an atypical path into the field, like TechHire participants, often face employer bias. However, with a comprehensive strategy to prepare the participants for their new IT occupations and the job search itself, this bias can be overcome, as demonstrated by Lee Baumann, a graduate of Employ Milwaukee’s TechHire project.

THE JOURNEY FROM TECHHIRE TO A CAREER

Baumann was 29 and unemployed when he connected with Employ Milwaukee’s TechHire project. He wanted a job that would be a good fit, an occupation he could grow with, and a

career he could be proud of.

Baumann had previously worked in disparate jobs including personal care attendant, marketing representative, and data entry clerk. Baumann took advantage of the full array of the TechHire program’s offerings. He completed the IT Service Center Technician certificate program¹ offered through Milwaukee Area Technical College and delivered at the TechForce Technology Training Center² near his home in North Milwaukee. The IT Service Center Technician certificate program provides technical skills training in computer information systems fundamentals, CompTIA A+ essentials and IT technician, and training for support center analysts. As a member of the IT Service Center Technician certificate program cohort, Baumann enjoyed the support of his fellow students and gained confidence as he assisted his peers. Through another component of the TechHire curriculum, he had opportunities to

apply his new skills by refurbishing computers, docking stations, and memory boards.

In addition to the technical knowledge he gained and practiced, Baumann worked with his career coach and the business services team to develop his job search strategy. He participated in workshops on job searches and interviewing to learn and practice the behaviors and develop the necessary materials to successfully attract hiring managers, land job interviews, and get

EMPLOY MILWAUKEE’S

TIPS FOR HELPING BUSINESSES THINK OUTSIDE OF THE “IDEAL CANDIDATE” BOX

- ⇒ **Engage with your industry advisory board members and sector partners to listen to their skill needs.** Provide real examples of how TechHire graduates have those skills or will acquire them via the program. Consider having a recent TechHire alum present to your industry group(s).
- ⇒ **Work closely with your local workforce area and community college business services team** to develop messaging and business outreach materials about TechHire—using industry-specific language—to share with your business stakeholders.
- ⇒ **Constantly reevaluate your TechHire curriculum** to ensure it results in ready-to-work graduates. Incorporate hands-on practice, knowledge-based skills training, technical certifications, and industry-relevant job search training.

employment offers. One of the workshops Baumann found particularly helpful was focused on effectively using social media, like LinkedIn, for job search. Thanks to the knowledge and tips presented in the workshop, he was able to craft a LinkedIn profile that appealed to hiring managers seeking IT service desk staff. He was soon contacted by recruiters for Kohl's and Northwestern Mutual seeking to fill their IT service desk openings.

Thanks to his preparation for and practice in interviewing, his practical experience with IT service desk tasks, and his IT service desk certification and training, Baumann presented himself with confidence during the job interviews and landed job offers from both companies!

He accepted the offer from Northwestern Mutual's recruiting and staffing firm, Apex Systems. Baumann worked for Northwestern Mutual as a contract employee of Apex Systems for six months and was then hired directly by the company. He is now a full-time technical support analyst for Northwestern Mutual, where he can work remotely 100% of the time or enjoy the free lunch and other perks of working in the office.



Lee Baumann

Baumann's gratitude for the opportunities he gained through the TechHire project spurred him to donate his time to the next generation of TechHire students. He shared the key to his career transition success with the current TechHire cohort: Take full advantage of all the TechHire program's offerings. He encouraged the current students to stay focused on their career goals, telling them if he could find success with the support of the TechHire program, they could, too. Baumann is not shy about telling everyone about the program and why it was good for him. He will be an excellent ombudsman as a candidate who took the other path.

KEYS TO SUCCESS

Cindy Anderson, Employ Milwaukee's TechHire project manager, shares her best advice for her peers:

1. **Make sure your TechHire project is designed to prepare participants for an occupation, not merely to obtain an IT certificate—unless it is the only qualification needed for a participant to be employable.** Employers say that they want to hire candidates who are ready to work, are familiar with the IT work environment, and can demonstrate that they can complete the key job tasks. Employ Milwaukee's TechHire program is designed with industry input to provide skills training, hands-on practical experience, and employability and job search skills, as well as wrap-around support from peers, career coaches, the business services team, and supportive services like transportation assistance, to ensure participant success.

- 2. Constantly cultivate your partnerships.** Partners, especially industry advisory board (IAB) members and business partners, can be your TechHire program's best advocates. Engage IAB members and business partners on an ongoing basis to ensure that the program curriculum reflects their needs. Invite business partners to participate in the employability and job search skills portion of the curriculum. Further, having business partners assist with mock job interviews can help hiring managers expand their view of appropriate IT job candidates while also offering the participants an opportunity to practice marketing their unique skills, knowledge, and abilities to their target employers. Anderson says she has developed relationships with the leadership and front-line staff of Apex Systems, an IAB member and the company that connected Baumann to his new IT career. Now Apex Systems staff refer the companies that need entry-level IT staff—but don't want to pay the recruiting agency's fees directly—to Anderson and Employ Milwaukee's TechHire initiative.
- 3. Remember to ask (and keep asking!) your partners for resources that can be leveraged to create holistic support for students to be successful in their training.** Employ Milwaukee's TechHire program benefits greatly from its partnership with Digital Bridge, the Milwaukee Area Technical College (MATC), and the TechForce Training Center. Digital Bridge provides hands-on practice for students to become familiar with key IT service center skills at no cost to the program. MATC now refers both TechHire candidates and other possible partners and training providers to the Employ Milwaukee's TechHire project. The relationships that Anderson and Employ Milwaukee staff have cultivated with the community and the faith-based organizations that founded the TechForce Training Center resulted in TechHire trainings being made available in a convenient neighborhood site at no cost to the project.
- 4. Be sure to collect participant stories—and photos—before, during, and after their participation in the TechHire program.** This can not only help to further refine the program by identifying areas needing improvement, but these stories provide vivid material to demonstrate to businesses and other stakeholders the value of the occupational training offered by the TechHire program.

“I absolutely love it here. I got the shift I wanted starting after training ends Monday. Free lunch. Great commute. Awesome people. Everyone in my training gets along with one another and actively tries to help each other to do better. Northwestern Mutual is a great place to work...and I wouldn't have gotten here without the training and support of TechHire and especially my career coach, Mr. Wilinski. He gave me a future to be proud of.”

- Lee Baumann

ENDNOTES

¹ For information on Employ Milwaukee's TechHire bootcamp, see <https://www.employmilwaukee.org/Employ-MKE/Techhireflyer0071.pdf>

² For more information on the TechForce Training Center, see <http://www.hacm.org/programs/community-supportive-services/employment-economic-self-sufficiency/techforce-techhire>

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