**WorkforceGPS**

**Transcript of Webinar**

**Engaging Employers to Scale Apprenticeships: The Employers' Perspective**

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LAURA CASERTANO: I want to welcome everyone to today's" Engaging Employers to Scale Apprenticeships, the Employers' Perspective" webinar, and I'm going to turn things over to your moderator today, Zodie Makonnen. She's a grant lead with Scaling Apprenticeship Through Sector-Based Strategies with the Division of Strategic Investments, Employment and Training Administration. Zodie, take it away.

ZODIE MAKONNEN: Thank you so much, Laura, and good afternoon, everyone. My name, again, is Zodie Makonnen. I work in the Division of Strategic Investments and I'm the grant lead for the Scaling Apprenticeship grants.

I'm very excited to welcome you to our webinar today, Engaging Employers to Scale Apprenticeships, an Employers' Perspective. And we have a great panel set up for you.

I wanted to briefly go over the objectives of the session today. In this session we'll help scaling apprenticeship grantees understand evolving issues being faced by employers, we'll hear from employers about the value of apprenticeship and how to connect the value of apprenticeships to employer return on investments or ROIC, and we'll learn about the impact of COVID-19 on employer operations.

With us today, we have Jan Bray, who's H-1B Scaling Apprenticeship Technical Assistance Coach and a subject matter expert from Manhattan Strategy Group. She'll be helping us facilitate the conversation and discussion today. I'm going to turn it over to Jan. Jan?

JAN BRAY: Thank you, Zodie. And let me add my welcome to everyone. This is a – going to be a very informative and engaging webinar today. I'm pleased to see so many people participating coming on to this. We are very lucky to have three really unique employers who represent – we are representing all of the three major industry sectors covered by this grant: IT, advanced manufacturing, and health care.

And I do know from all of the discussions with the grantees over the last year or so that employer engagement is a major issue. So today you get to hear from, as they say, the horse's mouth. You're going to hear from the employers and not some of those of us who think we know what we're saying. So, we are very pleased to have this webinar today.

So, these employers that we have coming, they were recommended by grantees, so they have strong partnerships. With three of the scaling apprenticeship grantees, and as I said, they have extensive experience working with colleges to put together to develop and implement successful registered apprenticeship programs. So, this is going to be a very insightful discussion today. So, with that, I'm going to briefly introduce our three panelists today and then I'll call on them to give a few brief words to start this off.

The first is, we have Carol Fineagan. Carol, right now is the CIO, the chief information officer for Nicholas & Company. She was previously with Franklin Covey. Carol has led technology teams and implemented technology strategies to move businesses and teams to the next level of growth for over 20 years. And she has developed an architected strategies which facilitate rapid business growth while reducing costs.

She's leading talented technicians in collaboration with savvy business leaders, and is always focused on the most effective and affordable tools for acquiring new businesses and increasing customer satisfaction. As she, Carol, has worked with executives to solve significant business problems and conduct mergers and acquisitions within the parameters of complex regulatory and international data privacy compliance.

As I said, she is currently the CIO for Nicholas & Company, having previously served as the CIO for Franklin Covey. And she is partnered – when she was at Franklin Covey, she partnered with Weber State in Utah. So, we're very pleased to have Carol here as part of this group.

Next, we have Abbygail, or Abby Clothier, who's the manager of Talent Partnerships with Centura Health in Colorado. She is a member of Greater Metro Denver Health Care Group and has worked at Centura Health for the past seven years. She has served in a variety of positions within the talent acquisition and workforce planning and has a passion for engaging in upskilling talent to fulfill critical workforce needs.

Her current role as manager of Talent Partnerships enabled her to develop and maintain strategic relationships with academic and workforce partnerships across the state. And as I said, she is partnering in the Scaling Apprenticeship grant with the Colorado Department of Higher Education.

And our third speaker is Sean Welsh, the senior learning and development specialist with West Pharmaceuticals Specialist, and he has worked at West Pharmaceuticals in this, and before he came to West Pharmaceutical Services, he worked at the Philadelphia shipyards, which supported the Steamfitters Apprenticeship program.

The shipyard has seen a drastic decline in skilled labor and needed a way to attract and rebuild their workforce, thus they created the apprenticeship program. When he came to West Pharmaceutical Services, he got a lot of feedback and he got a lot in the – found that they what they needed was very similar to what he had done in the shipyards. And so that's the value of apprenticeship is the model of that.

And when he saw an article featuring the Scaling Apprenticeship Grant and the goal, he immediately contacted Penn College to understand more. And here he is with the Pennsylvania College of Technology. So, we are very pleased to have Sean as part of our employer team today.

So, what we're going to do is to have each of the participants introduce their company so you have a better understanding of what their company is about. And then we're going to turn this into a conversation among the three panelists and myself. We are not going to do just presentations. And so, we have a series of issues and topics that we are going to be covering.

Feel free as we get into this conversation to put any questions or comments down. And we will try to answer them as we go along. I know we say we have question and answer at the end, and we certainly will continue that. But I hope you'll ask them as we go through this, because, as I said, not just presentations along there.

So, let me just briefly, you know, I think what's interesting with employer engagement and I always used to say to educators that, you know, sometimes we just talk different languages and an educator, a college, any kind of an educational institution wants to provide those knowledge and skills that are needed. And they are moving towards their focuses, developing that curriculum that meets that, but also getting that individual to be in line, completion.

An employer, while they certainly support that and want that, their focus is on return on investment, their bottom line. They need workers. They need workers who are going to be productive, who are going to add to their – reaching their bottom line and providing that ROI for the company. So as educators, we need to remember that. For the employers, it's the return on investment.

And therefore, for employers, for colleges, it's important to constantly be on top of the changing labor market trends, looking at job postings, the LMI that comes out from your state to see if they are currently hiring of apprentice-able occupations, if they're looking for workers that can be addressed through your current apprenticeship program.

I once had – I was listening to a CEO of a major corporation and he did a lot of apprenticeships and he said the reason he hires apprentices is because he brings them in at lower than the going rate, even though it goes up over time. And they are learning not only the skills that are needed, but they're learning the company's processes and culture at the same time. So, when that person completes the apprenticeship program, they are absolutely ready to work on day one. Their productivity rate has gone high, which, of course, leads back to return on investment.

And as you work with employers, it's not just about the apprenticeship program. And so, I found this was interesting. The levels of engagement actually came from the Department of Labor on apprenticeship.gov and I thought it was an interesting way of putting out the strategy of working with employers. They go everywhere from advising, developing an information exchange, assessing employers' needs, what they need to help you build your curriculum.

So, it might start off informally in an advising capacity, moving to more of a working relationship where you are really working to build that employer trust to help solidify that relationship, utilizing the employer in putting together the curriculum speakers at different programs in your college, helping with resources.

But it really becomes – takes it to the next level where you have a very close relationship, which then moves into much more of a strategic partnership, which is really designed for co-leadership. You know, not only are you, the college, a valuable resource to the employer, but this is when you become much more dependent on each other. Where are you going to be going, here's our need, let's do this together. And this is where an employer becomes a full-fledged partner. And I thought that was an interesting way of laying it out.

So, employers, at the end of the day, they have the need for people. They need to know that you have an apprenticeship program, how they can engage with you, and what an apprenticeship program is about if they've never done one before. So, it's getting that conversation going and building it along the way. So those are real simple general strategies for employer engagement, because what I really wanted our time to be spent on today is for you to hear from the employers and for the conversation that we are going to have.

So, let me turn to Carol Fineagan, and Carol's going to talk about it from her time in Franklin Covey, might even from Nicholas & Company, which is where she is now in Utah, and Carol, I'm going to turn it over to you.

CAROL FINEAGAN: Thank you so much. Hi, everyone. So, when I was about only two weeks into my new job at Nicholas & Company, which is why I feel really confident representing Franklin Covey on this apprenticeship program that we undertook. Franklin Covey, as many of you know, as a world leader in organizational change and results. So, we go into Fortune 500 organizations globally and help them with culture and educate their up-and-coming leaders and executive leadership team.

We also have a continuing education department which issues credits globally and based on the employer's requirements for training. Many of the Fortune 500 companies engage with our certified trainers and also through our All Access Pass online portal program to develop customized leadership, culture and diversity training. Recently, we released Unconscious Bias, so the diversity and inclusion sector is a big one for Franklin Covey.

We also offer K through 12 teacher and administrator education through the portal called Leader in Me, which is again a lot of the base Franklin Covey training such as the Seven HAbbyts, The Speed of Trust, but modeled for teachers and administrators globally in 20 languages offered to 120 countries. And that's me. And Nicholas is a food distribution company here in the Western states, and I look forward to introducing them to apprenticeship programs.

MS. BRAY: Thank you, Carol. Glad you're part of this. Abby, [inaudible] Centura Health.

ABBYGAIL CLOTHIER. Yes, hi. Thank you for having me on this webinar today. Super happy to be here and to talk about apprenticeships in the health care space. So, a little bit about Centura Halth. We are a nonprofit, faith-based health care organization based here in the Colorado region. We've got 17 hospitals and over 200 different outpatient practices. So, our services range from kind of inpatient hospital to home care, emergency urgent care and, of course, specialty primary care practices. So we serve kind of the full gamut of health care here in Colorado and western Kansas.

We employ roughly 21,000 associates across our connected ecosystem. And we have been working with the Colorado Community College System and the Colorado Department of Higher Education on this grant and have currently five different registered apprenticeship programs: medical assisting, sterile processing, pharmacy tech, medical lab tech and our newest in the surgical tech space.

So, I've been working with the community colleges here in Colorado pretty consistently for the past four years or so. And we've come quite a long way in building out apprenticeships as a part of our workforce development strategy. So, looking forward to continuing the conversation regarding apprenticeships today.

MS. BRAY: Thank you, Abby. And being a resident of Colorado myself, I'm very familiar with Centura, and I'm glad you guys are there. So, thank you.

MS. CLOTHIER: Thank you.

MS. BRAY: Sean, can we talk about West Pharmaceuticals services.

SEAN WELSH: Absolutely, thank you. So, we are a industrial manufacturing. So, we're advanced manufacturing in the pharma industry, working with mainly injectable drug delivery systems and packaging. We have currently 24 sites over the globe. I focus on the Americas. We have – in our sights, we have 10 sites right now going through in the U.S. and Puerto Rico, through six different apprenticeship programs.

We started last year with our first group of cohorts, part of what we started to see in the business, my role in learning and development was that our frontline employees were not getting the real technical training. We have to follow ISO documents and FDA and all things like that, but we needed to focus on growth and development of these people as we realized that 25 percent of our workforce is about to retire. So, we need to develop our next level of subject matter experts.

And in manufacturing itself, there is a huge gap coming with skilled labor. Deloitte did a state of the industry and they said in the next 10 years there's going to be 3.5 million manufacturing jobs and 2 million of them are going to go unfulfilled because we don't have the labor. So, we took it upon ourselves that we have to start developing that within, to increase A, employee engagement, B, to create our next level subject matter experts, and then show career path for them within the company as well.

So the program itself is focused on some advanced manufacturing, but it also builds in people skills, business skills, things like that, that really help kind of help the team members and those frontline supervisors as well get the training they need with the mentoring they need on top of that. We have 148, I think, is the last count that we have in the first two years.

I am located in Exton, Pennsylvania, but we have sites in Arizona; Grand Rapids, Michigan, all over Pennsylvania; Florida; North Carolina; Nebraska; and Puerto Rico that have joined this program.

MS. BRAY: Oh, that's great. So, our grantees are on the phone in those states, there's potential partners for you, so that's where we go [inaudible]. You might get inundated. So, yeah, so how do you build those strong relationships with employers? And so, what we're going to engage in now is a discussion on that. And again, I want to encourage the attendees, if you have any questions, you need clarification on anything that was said, please put it into the chat box and we will try to address your questions as we go through this.

So, actually, the first question I want to ask the three of you is how did you get started with the college? And, you know, and how is the partnership working? You know, have there been bumps in the road? How have you and the college worked together to overcome those bumps? What has kept you going with the college? And Sean, I'm going to start with you to answer that one first and then Carol and Abby, if you can chime in.

MR. WELSH: Yeah, sure, so we have a longstanding relationship with Penn College of Technology from the past because we have two sites in the Williamsport Jersey Shore area, which is where in Pennsylvania and not Jersey Shore, New Jersey, that we have donated products to them, we've helped them with equipment and kind of just have a longstanding relationship there to begin with.

But it was very small and it was very focused around those two sites. I got pulled into that from a corporate level, that relationship because of the local sites. And as we started looking at it, we saw an article come out on the grant, the Midas Grant and that Penn College was receiving that grant. So, we immediately went to them and set up a meeting to ask, you know, what's going on here? What is this? How else can we get involved?

Because that relationship already started, our local sites tried to do a pre-apprenticeship program with them. They're in the community together. So, they're at a lot of the trade shows. It's a big push in the community to try to get some technical skills. But the fact that we already had a standing relationship with them made it very easy. And then just some due diligence, due diligence on our end to see that.

To be honest, we contacted them about the grant. They didn't contact us, but because we know each other and we see each other's stuff, it was something that popped up on our radar.

MS. BRAY: So, what I love, Sean, about what you said is you went – you moved from – I'm going back to my original thing from advising to, you know, to a working relationship to where you finally got to this strategic partnership, which is two-way. And so, those three things work.

MR. WELSH: Yeah, we do join in on their career days. We join in locally whenever they have like an event to talk to the local high schools, to try to find people, to find the skilled labor market instead of going to college, so we go to those events with them and sit next to them and talk about what the opportunities are.

MS. BRAY: That's great. Yeah, it's a good partnership. Abby, what about with Centura Health in Colorado?

MS. CLOTHIER: Sure, so we had started talking about apprenticeships as a way to close that skills gap, specifically in the medical assistant space. Medical assistants are very difficult to find, and they're also kind of what we would consider sort of a springboard position. So, they're a good entry level roll into health care, but we have a difficult time really retaining them.

So, we decided that we wanted to work with a local college within the Denver metro area, really to develop an apprenticeship program. So, we connected with a few different schools and really ended up partnering with a school that shared our vision for how to develop apprenticeship programs that would be most beneficial to the apprentice and to the employer. And I would say that that program has been very successful. We're in our third year of that program with very high completion and pass rates, and we just continue to develop that relationship with that school and other community colleges in the Colorado area.

So, I would say really what kind of continues to keep us engaged with the community colleges and the apprenticeship programs is just that shared, you know, understanding and mission of why these apprenticeship programs are so important and the impact that they can make on our communities.

MS. BRAY: Okay. Carol?

MS. FINEAGAN: Yes, so in Utah, we have a very aggressive technology market. We, at Franklin Covey were, and all of the CIOs as my peers in Utah, were always looking for development talent, so developers, entry level developers and web technologies and other platforms. I became aware of the apprenticeship program through the governor's office initially and U.S. Department of Labor, which built a partnership in Utah with the CIOs.

And then working with Weber State, I have been connected with them since I moved to Utah 14 years ago. They're a recognized college partner of our tech organization, which is called Silicon Slopes. So, having that tech college partnership and then as part of our diversity and inclusion program at Franklin Covey, we were looking for nontraditional avenues to get new talent into the pipeline because really each of the CIOs in Utah was robbing Peter to pay Paul, if you don't mind the expression. We were taking talent from each other and the salaries were going higher and higher and it was becoming a bidding war.

And very few people in the pipeline to put into these jobs, these entry level to mid-level jobs. So, the apprenticeship program for myself and my peers was a true gift, you know, for the investment we made and the time commitment, really top quality talent and training programs to deliver the entry level people into our program that we would never have found otherwise. So that's how I became introduced to the apprenticeship program.

MS. BRAY: So let me ask, you know, I mean, these are all thankfully very positive statements. What issues did you face or challenges faced as you embarked on both developing and working on the apprenticeship program, as well as working with the college? And how did you – what steps did it take to overcome them? Anybody want to jump in there first?

MS. FINEAGAN: This is Carol, if you don't mind me talking again. The biggest challenge – the biggest challenge we faced was internally with our HR department and educating them on what was an apprentice. The pay structure was out of our traditional pay group in a corporate environment. So, and then educating the team, the technology team as to what an apprentice is. We did a lot of training and assigned a mentor to our apprentice.

But working with the organizations, training the apprentices was the easiest part. And I'm going to say that was because they had a well thought out training program that met our job description requirements. So that was the other thing, is have a very firm job description of the roles and responsibilities you want the apprentice to take on and what skills they need. Once we had that mapped out, it was getting a traditional corporation to make an entry way in for a nontraditional employee type. And that just took education and conversation, but it worked very well.

MS. BRAY: Abby, I should say, sorry. Sorry about that.

MS. CLOTHIER: I can jump in really quick. I would say health care is unique. It's a highly regulated industry and many of our positions require specific education or certification requirements. So, our industry – apprenticeships is a very new concept and not unlike the others, other industries that are on the phone. But I would say some of the biggest challenges that we've ran into specifically because I'm sure health is geographically diverse.

We are in very metro areas and in very rural areas. And so, the number of apprentices or participation required to enroll through some of the community college programs have been a little bit challenging because they don't always align with our workforce demands and what our business needs are. So, I would say really with the with the partnerships with the community colleges, I would say that is probably our biggest challenge. And we've come a long ways in trying to figure out creative solutions for how to work together to fill those gaps. But I would say that's our biggest piece that we're continuing to work on.

MR. WELSH: I can add too. There were two major pain points for us, and one is making sure that the college is communicating with us correctly and not on top of each other with multiple people, with multiple things coming at me. Four different programs of four different people sending information. And at the other end, internally in the company is, and I think Abby just talked about this.

This is – I have experience with apprenticeships in the standard labor market. This is new to manufacturing, advanced manufacturing. Most of our people kept calling this "training" and they thought it was just training. We're going to go do training. You have this training plan. I said no. That's like 25 percent of it. 75 percent is the mentoring and on-the-job work. So, you guys have to understand that. So, educating our operations team to understand that and making sure operations and HR works. So that it wasn't one pointing to the other. So that was hard.

And for me, the kind of way we got past that is I became the single point of contact on both ends. So, I said, you guys only send stuff to me, I send it out. Same with any information on the other end, the same way. Yes, it's a lot of work for me and hopefully I can transition it on to somebody else.

But if there were emails going out to everybody everywhere, it would have been a mess. And that's how it kind of started, that people were approving things in different groups and nobody knew what was going on. So, we needed to centralize two single point of contacts between the college and myself to say, what are we doing? Where are we at? What do we need to do to fill the gaps?

MS. BRAY: So, one of the things, and you actually that made me think of it, Sean, when you mentioned mentorship and supervision on site. That gets raised a lot of times by employers, especially a small employer and I know you guys aren't small employers. But you know that that's a stumbling block. That's a barrier that they just don't want to put in – how – for all of you, how much – how is that been addressed? Was that a potential challenge that got addressed, or that was just accepted and it's okay?

MR. WELSH: It's still a challenge today. And it's because I don't have boots on the ground to work with the mentors at sites. Operations kind of compartmentalized this is an HR program. The way that we're addressing it is we are working directly with our leaders in operations, who are the ones now backing this program. We have monthly mentor calls. We have occasional, I wouldn't say all the time, but we have meetings about the program updates. We do surveys.

So, last year when we went through our first year, we found out by mid-year that more than half of our apprentices hadn't even met their mentor yet. So, we had to start some internal accountability. The good thing is the college for us gives us the competency checklist to follow. They did offer mentor training, but we built that internally and had it. It's – the execution is the hard thing to do.

And without leadership on board internally in the company, it's going to be impossible. And it's – we're turning the corner, but it was something that we had to stumble upon and something we kept saying. And then we saw what we were saying come true. So, we had to readjust.

MS. BRAY: With that, Abby, what about at Centura? You know, that's a large system. How do you handle mentorship and supervision there?

MS. CLOTHIER: Yeah, that's a great question. So, a couple of things. We have – to Sean's earlier poin,t really made sure that we're building in accountability for the program within the kind of centers of excellence, if you will. So, for a particular program, I'll pick (show processing ?). We have apprentices at multiple different sites. We've structured the apprenticeship program so that it really mirrors what an employee looks like on the leader side. So, they have access to their time sheets. They have to follow all the same processes for human resources. That's really helped kind of break that student versus employee perspective.

And then within health care, I would say precepting and mentoring is pretty routine, thankfully. So that wasn't a huge barrier for us. But I would say it was challenging balancing the apprentices as employees and differentiating that from clinical students who are coming in for rotations. Because one of the challenges that we have within health care is the number of folks going through these academic programs is limited by the number of clinical placements you can offer within your facilities. So that that's been a challenge.

But what we've also done is we've identified a – what we call an educator or a trainer within that business area, that round with the apprentices and the preceptors on a monthly basis. And then we also have monthly check-in calls, too. So, I think we've come up with a pretty good system for making sure that everybody is informed and supported. But again, I think health care is pretty used to kind of that preceptor mentor model. So thankfully, we have that going for us.

MS. BRAY: And, Carol, at Franklin Covey, how about that issue?

MS. FINEAGAN: So when we were assigned a mentor, I mean a an apprentice, we actually built a process in where we had a mentor waiting for that apprentice to come in. We also implemented a process, since this is a technical role for peer review of code, we already have that for the senior developers. And what we did is apply that to the entry level people and really spent a lot of time, not excessive, but a lot of time training the new apprentice on the tools that we use.

But when they come out of their training program from the college, you know, they had the technical competencies, but they don't have the work process and the specific tools our company used. So, we actually wrote out a process for onboarding, specifically entry level talent, whether they be an apprentice or if we down the road hired entry level people from another venue, we wanted to make sure we had a smooth process for onboarding them.

We really didn't have any hurdles in bringing an apprentice into our environment because IT people in general love to share what they learn and what they know. So that that process worked really well. And it was – it's scalable for us as well once we documented that onboarding process and the training program, the mentorship. And that just helped us keep our mentorships inside the company also because a lot of IT people will do mentorships outside of the company to mentor young talent. So, we were able to retain that knowledge inside, which was a huge benefit to the company.

MS. BRAY: So, Carol, I'm going to follow up with you for a moment. This is much more IT focused, but I have you, so I'm going to take advantage of it. And I know Franklin Covey isn't specifically an IT company, but I think the IT sector is one that colleges or anybody have trouble getting companies to do apprenticeships, to accept apprenticeship. They just you know, it's almost like it's new to them. Have you heard that from colleagues? And what is – what's a good way for these colleges to overcome? What can they say or do that overcome that?

MS. FINEAGAN: So, I'm going to talk about degree versus non-degree IT at colleges and what has been the greatest value to myself and peers is hiring people who have certifications in a specific area or dedicated training. So, say if it's JavaScript, that's a program you use to write web interfaces. If we can work with the community colleges and universities to develop the apprenticeship training that may be a nontraditional program for that college, just like apprentices or nontraditional for corporate America.

It takes a more dedicated program, when you're going to turn someone around in a matter of months into a valuable ROI type employee, you kind of have to mix and match some of the certificate, traditional certificate-type training in with some of the traditional degree-type training. So, I think a tighter partnership with the universities and the community colleges and the employer on the job descriptions and the skills required, because that's what we're hiring for is skills. We're not hiring for a degree with an apprentice.

But, you know, we want to be mindful that that person could eventually be sponsored by a company to get into a degree program. So, you're building that long-term relationship and maybe just with snippets of education to begin with, to get them in the door and earning a salary and producing code and technology that's valuable to the employer.

MS. BRAY: Well, that's good advice and I appreciate it, Carol, because that's an issue. Let me ask you both, Abby and Sean. I know that's not so much an issue, but Carol raised the issue about degrees. Do your apprentices, through [inaudible], do any of them get credit at the colleges? Do they wind up with an associate's degree at the end or they are just a few credits shy? Is that also a goal that they have and that the company has?

MR. WELSH: They do – the go ahead, Abby, you go first, please.

MS. CLOTHIER: Oh, I'm sorry. So, for us, it depends on the program. So, a couple of our programs are associates degree programs by the pure nature of what's required for the role. And some of them are just certificate programs. So really, for us, it's just ensuring that these folks are adequately prepared to meet the requirements of the job description and graduate with the appropriate competencies and certifications to perform the role. So, it really, for us, depends on the particular program.

MR. WELSH: So, yeah, we're more of the latter. They have – will get college credits and they can use them if they do want to finish with associate's degree. But the programs are so specific for skillsets that we've identified. So, we have a mechatronics, which is a maintenance technician for advanced manufacturing. It's a four-year program that they'll get a certificate. But it's – we really are focused on the change in manufacturing is towards automation and robotics. So, we're trying to upskill at this point and make sure that we're prepared for the future. Yeah, there's no actual degree, but there are credits earned.

MS. BRAY: Ok, so let me ask, then, sort of this somewhat related, you know, obviously there are evolving workforce needs in all companies, skills changed, employers, customers change, economics change, etc. So, are there – two questions related to this. What issues are facing your company? And if you can extend it to the industry, great. And is the apprenticeship program, how is that addressing it? Can it address it? And how is it addressing it? And Abby, I'll start with you.

MS. CLOTHIER: Yes, so the needs within the health care space, as you can imagine, are coming a lot from COVID and I, I know that's a question that you want to get to later on, but I would say some of our apprentices have stepped in to help us with staffing COVID clinics or supporting COVID call centers. And it's been an amazing experience for both them and for us.

And I would say our industry really is continuing to evaluate what telemedicine looks like in the future of providing health care and our workforce needs, I don't think change as quickly as maybe some within the IT or tech space because of the way that our care models are established are fairly consistent and only change so much. You always need nurses and physicians and medical assistants, for example.

But we are seeing quite a bit of change as a result of COVID and our operations and our work processes. And we have seen that our apprentices have been a great benefit for that because we are able to tap into them as of additional resources and bandwidth. And then again, it's being able to build our future pipeline. So, looking into the future, forecasting what those needs are to the best of our ability and making sure that we have the workforce that's necessary to fill those positions when they do come available.

And one thing that we're focusing a lot on is upskilling and reskilling our current staff. So as things do change within the health care field, looking at how we can take our current population and help them pivot into areas of opportunity for them, and a lot of the time it is through these apprenticeship programs so they have been wildly beneficial in that space.

MS. BRAY: Carol, how bad is it? You know, whether it's your Franklin Covey or Nicholas, what changes have been faced by these companies, especially in those related to IT?

MS. FINEAGAN: Yeah, I think if you talk to any CIO in the US or Europe, we are frantically looking to hire people. And two things driving that. First of all, you said at the beginning, Franklin Covey is not a technology company. Actually, they are now. Eighty percent of their contents being delivered over portals globally. And luckily, we were positioned to do that prior to COVID hitting.

With remote workers and remote education right now, we have an opportunity to train up through apprenticeship even more people who want to either change careers or maybe they've been disenfranchised or laid off from a career that no longer exists, especially in the service industry. And people who have an aptitude for IT are sometimes in the most unusual places. I mean, you don't know till you screen them and test them and put them through some training.

So, every company is becoming a technology company. Abby mentioned telemedicine. Everyone is depending upon their computer, Zoom, interfaces for their customers and their employees. At Nicholas & Company, everyone's working remotely except for the warehouse and truck drivers who are delivering food to restaurants that are starting to open.

But there is a huge need for technology professionals at all levels in the country right now. And what we were facing before COVID even is a lack of visas for even bringing in talented people from other countries. And that was a fallback plan for a lot of us as CIOs. And that got cut off. And then with COVID, people can't travel. So even if we did have the visa opportunity, we couldn't get the people in.

And now I think the real opportunity is to retrain a lot of people into apprenticeship programs, to change careers and selfishly help people like myself who are trying to hire developers and system admins, project managers, QA people, the whole pipeline of applications, development, and service support to an industry, any industry's network and remote workers.

So, I think it's just exploded in the last year, the opportunity for apprentice talent and also for community colleges and universities to do distance learning. We can hire a distance apprentice. We don't have to see them. We can have a mentor online with them. So, everything you and I are doing to work at home can be applied to the apprentice program successfully.

MS. BRAY: And you're absolutely right and you're right. You know, you raise a good issue, what is an IT company anymore? You know, it's becoming all IT. So that's a good point. A question for you, Carol, which I know probably everybody sitting there is going, is Franklin Covey, you know, across the country and are they are hiring apprentices in many states?

MS. FINEAGAN: Well, Franklin Covey is headquartered in Salt Lake. So, the answer is no, they are not hiring. So, everything comes out of Salt Lake, Utah. And I know we'll get to the COVID question, but due to COVID, the hiring process kind of got shut down during COVID because we're in 120 countries and I'll say 60 of those countries just shut down everything for the last year and they're just starting back up.

So, I see future opportunity for apprentice candidates at Franklin Covey, but I also see some for Nicholas & Company because I'm taking that program with me as my value add from Franklin Covey to spread the cheer at Nicholas & Company to bring in some apprentices.

MS. BRAY: And that's great. So, Weber State, you have a good partnership there. Good for you.

MS. FINEAGAN:

MS. BRAY: That's a very strategic partnership. Sean, how about you?

MR. WELSH: Can you repeat the question? I'm listening. I forget exactly what was asked. I have an idea, but if you could just repeat the question.

MS. BRAY: Yeah, was that actually was, how is the company evolving over time, your work space, how are they evolving and how does that impact the apprentice and adding new ones, changing, etc.?

MR. WELSH: Thank you. The biggest issue we have in manufacturing and pretty much all skilled labor in the U.S. is that schools have discontinued voc tech programs. And we are – have turned into a country of telling everybody they should go to college. And what that is doing is that's bringing in less people straight from high school or straight from a job thought process of going into a skilled labor field, which has been a struggle.

And part of the idea is that this program and having these programs is an advantage as we externally recruit to say, hey, come work for us, you're going to earn a federally recognized journey worker degree, papers so you can take anywhere. And there is a career path. And this helps show off more of the career path that we would bring people in, hopefully get them on the first level of really advanced training on manufacturing because the field is gone from everybody put something into a mold and stamp it down to, now you've got to program this machine to do it. Now you have to understand these reports.

So, we have to change the way we work, as we automate, as we go to robotics. But at the same time, the lack of pure skilled labor in the U.S. has taken a dramatic turn. So. we have to now look to build our own. And that's what's driving us right now. And that's what we're up against.

MS. BRAY: That's a good point. And apprenticeship, basically, lets you build your own, in essence, you know.

MR. WELSH: Exactly.

MS. BRAY: Yeah, so that's the value. So, let me ask the three of you, because it's been interspersed throughout all of our discussion, is the impact of COVID-19 on your operations and how did it impact your plans for developing or expanding apprenticeships? So, Carol, I'll revert back to you since you started to talk about it, I'll come to you first.

MS. FINEAGAN: Well, the first hurdle we have with COVID was the program we were under for apprenticeship, had the person working – our latest apprentice, working on site. Well, no one was on site. And then we had to adjust and figure out, what was the best way to mentor this person, do the code reviews online, just basically shift online and not have our apprentice feel abandoned. I mean, that was a real worry we had, because as IT professionals, we've been practicing for years to work from home. We love it.

But as an apprentice new to an organization, it was kind of daunting, I believe, to them, because everyone was gone. There was no facility to come to. It also did put the kibosh on hiring. So, we had plans to bring in more apprentices because we had such a positive experience with the program. And we're really looking forward to more.

But the reason I'm at Nicholas, quite frankly, is we had to shut down all projects and reduce headcount and IT. So, I am elsewhere and a lot of my team are elsewhere right now. So COVID had a significant impact.

What we're going to see in the next 12 months is hiring pick up and resume. I think it's a great time to be getting apprentice candidates into the pipeline and into training because it's so cost effective. When you're looking at rehiring, and do you hire a senior or junior person that's at a very high salary or do you invest in an apprentice? It seems to me a no-brainer to invest in an apprentice and help them help the company at the same time financially.

So that's my crystal ball. At Nicholas we are hiring because the food industry is rapidly scaling up as restaurants and schools and all the social events pick up that require food. I guess they don't require food, but we enjoy the food at these social events. So, the food industry I'm seeing is hiring quicker than my counterparts in the service in the traditional tech and business services industries.

MS. BRAY: So, yeah, COVID, it really impacted all of us in one way or another. Abby, what about you? What impact has COVID had? I know you've addressed it a little bit, but on Centura Health?

MS. CLOTHIER: Yeah, so it's actually been interesting. We were able to get through COVID and our apprenticeship programs were relatively unscathed. We had been through a period of really restricting people coming into our hospitals, obviously for valid reasons. And we were no longer allowing visitors or volunteers. We weren't allowing people coming in for clinical rotations, for academic programs, which has a number of different issues downstream that we don't need to go into.

But one of the things that was unique and interesting is that our apprentices were associates so we could continue to have them come on site and continue to complete their program. So, everyone graduated on time. I don't think that we lost a huge number of people due to COVID. We were successful in partnering with our workforce and academic partners and giving people the wraparound services that they need. So, it was it was surprising, honestly, how well these group of folks did. And we just graduated a super resilient and amazing group of folks.

So, we haven't seen the number of apprentices reduced due to COVID, by any means. We've continued to build out new programs. We just launched our surgical tech apprenticeship program this fall. So, we are continuing to push ahead. And if anything, I think COVID has really helped show the value of apprenticeship programs to our operational leaders and their resiliency and flexibility. And to the point made earlier, cost-effectiveness of having apprentices. So, you know, it's gone from fairly well for us here at Centura.

MS. BRAY: Sean?

MR. WELSH: Yeah, we had the reverse issue. I mean, we – we're more in demand than ever, we're on most of the drugs that are part of the COVID vaccine. So, our products are in tandem with a lot of that stuff. So actually, we've hired – our hiring's almost doubled or tripled at our sites, and our production demands are up and we have been struggling with overtime and stuff like that.

So, when it came up last year, when things started to happen, we just kind of started the program. And we had an open discussion with all the site directors and operations, said, is something that we need to pause or is this something that we can keep going with? And the honest answer was, this is too important to stop.

So, we had 44 people going through four programs last year and we just realized that certain times they're going to be off shift and they're going to have to be part of some training and there's going to be some mentoring. But it was a program that had such again, that cost, that return on investment that, even in that short time, they already had seen the results and heard the feedback that we weren't going to stop and we were going to persevere through it.

And actually, this year, we've more than doubled the amount of people from last year, even with our increased demand. Sorry, dropped my phone. Even with our increased demand and things like that. So, the value was seen by our leaders and that was what the most important was, it's not again, I can't say – I want to make sure it's clear. Don't sell it to HR. HR doesn't need to buy it.

It needs to be operations. It needs to be your ID, whoever they are, because at this point, they're not sure what this is and they're not sure what an apprenticeship program is other than training. And that's – that's what they need to understand, that it's bigger than that. And we really had the skill gap that we saw coming. So it hit home when we brought those facts to light.

MS. BRAY: And that's good, and you sort of led into my very last question, because we're almost out of time. I was going to ask each of you to answer in 30 seconds or less. One, will you continue the partnership with the colleges and beyond this grant related to apprenticeship? And do you have one piece of advice to give to everybody who's listening about how to work with an employer? So, Sean, I heard you say don't sell it to HR, but let me turn it back to Sean. Will you continue with that PTAT beyond this grant doing apprenticeship? And is there any one piece of advice, quickly?

MR. WELSH: Yeah, we're – that's what we're planning on once the money goes. But yes, we see it as a strategic imperative and will continue at some level. It may not be to the same length or degree, but absolutely. And I said, that one piece of advice is HR has to be there to help organize it, but the business needs to understand the value of it.

MS. BRAY: Okay, Abby, what about you? Do you think that'll continue and a piece of advice?

MS. CLOTHIER: Thanks. Yeah, I think we definitely will continue to engage with the community colleges and continue to develop and scale apprenticeship programs. We've seen a lot of value through these programs. And I think my one piece of advice would be just to keep an open mind. These apprenticeship programs are a different model than traditional academic programs, so flexibility is key.

MS. BRAY: And Carol?

MS. FINEAGAN: Absolutely, I know that my peers in Utah who have worked with the apprentice program love it. We see it as another option in ways that we can hire, which is just critical for us as IT professionals. And my piece of advice to the colleges would be stay close to the professional associations where the people – where the technology professionals are. If you're aiming for technology hires, be part of those organizations. And I'll say Weber State does a brilliant job of that. So, you have to be where the employers are, at a professional association level and present to them as a group. And that works tremendously well.

MS. BRAY: Well, thank you, Carol, Abby, and Sean. You guys have been absolutely awesome, and I know you gave some really good pearls of wisdom to everybody listening. I also want to thank Weber State, Pennsylvania College of Technology, and the Colorado Board of Higher Education for identifying you and recommending you to participate in it.

And with that, I'm going to turn it back to Zodie.

MS. MAKONNEN: Thank you, Jan. And I would like to repeat, thank you so much to our presenters for taking the time to share their expertise and experience. As mentioned before, please make sure you send your questions to the Scaling Apprenticeship mailbox, and we look forward to speaking to you again soon.

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