LEARNING WHILE WORKING: *BUILDING 21ST CENTURY COMPETENCY-BASED APPRENTICESHIPS*

In today's world, learning – whether through education, training or experience – and working are no longer independent, stand-alone domains. The innovation-driven economy demands that individuals weave learning opportunities throughout their careers to upgrade their skills, acquire new competencies and apply them across multiple jobs and industries. Work-and-learn models, including industry-led and business-supported apprenticeship programs, are a proven tool to connect learning directly to work *and* to help employers recruit, train and advance well-qualified employees.

Why Apprenticeship? Apprenticeships address the needs of both employees and employers. For employees, apprenticeships emphasize practical, on-the-job learning for individuals who need to earn while they learn. For employers, apprenticeships offer a turnkey solution to common hiring conundrums, such as how to attract and retain qualified workers who understand an employer's way of doing business; how to identify the technical *and* foundational skills necessary in a specific line of work; and how to streamline training to use time, money and other resources efficiently.

Why Competency-Based? Competency-based means linking success to mastery of established skill sets, rather than to completing courses that require a rigid set of hours. Apprentices progress at their own pace, so their training is more efficient and tailored to their needs and the company's requirements. This flexibility and customization allow for better trained employees. Integrating industry-recognized credentials into an apprenticeship is a proven way of assessing gained competencies and indicating when an apprentice is ready to advance. Competencies and associated credentials can be based on a formal job analysis, and as apprentices achieve competencies, their entry-level pay scale can increase at checkpoints designated by the employer.

The National Network has developed an approach, outlined in this document, to help employers develop competency-based apprenticeships. It is applicable across multiple industry sectors and at companies of any size. This framework is the first step to describing that model. The National Network intends to evolve the model to enable flexibility for multiple industry sectors and show examples of models across industries and companies. For more information, visit **actfdn.org and businessroundtable.org/closingtheskillsgap.**

PART I: DESIGNING A COMPETENCY-BASED APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAM

DETERMINE THE OPPORTUNITY
- Identify the need for additional skilled labor within key occupation(s)
- Identify the specific skills needed for those occupations
- Determine whether the(se) occupation(s) can be learned on-the-job at your company
- Assess whether your company has the resources and personnel available to teach and train on site or the capacity to outsource components of instruction

IDENTIFY TOTAL COMPETENCY REQUIREMENTS
- Determine competencies required for selective certifications (if applicable)
- Determine competencies specific to your company
- Assess whether to include "soft skills" (see the Network's Common Employability Skills framework for reference)

IDENTIFY RELATED TECHNICAL INSTRUCTION/EDUCATION PROVIDERS
- Understand federal guidelines
  - U.S. DOL recommends 144 hours of related instruction per year
  - Training can be provided during working hours or during non-working hours
- Research providers (online, community or technical colleges)
- Coordinate effort between sponsoring employers and training providers (e.g. community colleges) to develop the appropriate academic, technical and core course work for the apprentices

DEVELOP COMPANY ON-THE-JOB TRAINING PLAN
- Observe, interview and survey employees to develop a list of all tasks performed
- Set task standards to describe how well the task is to be performed or its required level of skill
- Identify the skills and knowledge apprentices will need in order to perform the tasks
- Coordinate the theory instruction with the sequence of on-the-job skills to be acquired by the individual

CREATE A PROGRESSIVE WAGE SCHEDULE
- Reflect competencies, credentials and job performance in the progressive wage schedule
- Consider individual's competency level, years of previous experience in the field and number of credit hours completed in related instruction
- Consider additional pay incentives

DEVELOP CRITERIA FOR APPRENTICE SELECTION

- Determine the number of apprentices your company and training function can support.
- Review any mandatory guidelines based on standards (age, previous education and/or experience, U.S. citizenship)
- Consider candidate's foundation of knowledge, skills and experience directly related to the competency requirements and demonstration of reliability, accountability, motivation and ambition
- Consider internal applicants and external recruits
- Consider any testing requirements (i.e., Career Aptitude Placement test) or point-system requirements

CONSIDER REGISTERING PROGRAM WITH OA/SAA

- Contact your registration agency - The U.S. Department of Labor Office of Apprenticeship (OA) or your State Apprenticeship Agency (SAA) for guidelines and requirements

PART II: IMPLEMENTING THE PROGRAM

SELECT, RECRUIT AND PREPARE YOUR APPRENTICES

- Know and understand applicable federal laws and guidelines
  - The National Apprenticeship Act of 1937
  - Federal Equal Opportunity laws
  - Registered Apprenticeship Standards - 29 CFR Parts 29 and 30
  - Affirmative Action
- Host a preliminary orientation to cover apprentice, staff and company responsibilities

DEVELOP PROGRAM OVERSIGHT AND INFRASTRUCTURE

- Structure outline covering company oversight and day-to-day management
- Determine leadership of company's competency-based apprenticeship program
- Determine supervision of apprentices and delivery of on-the-job training
- Support processing, hiring and guideline compliance and other administrative duties
- Implement record keeping and tracking
- Establish a process for assessing performance of apprentices

DESIGN PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

- Establish a mechanism to measure short and long-term performance of individual apprentices and the company-specific apprenticeship program
  - Formal Performance Measuring Mechanism - performance agreement, performance appraisal process and reward and incentive program
  - Informal Performance Measuring Mechanisms - monitoring, feedback, performance support

MANAGE THE CREDENTIALING PROCESS

- Review the components of the certification (theory vs. performance)
- Ensure supervisors are familiar with the required competencies and skills
- Take necessary steps to support apprentices in successfully achieving certification(s)

WORK WITH STAKEHOLDERS FOR EVALUATION

- Form an Apprenticeship Advisory Committee internally with representatives from the company's employees, mid-management and executive leadership

MARKET YOUR APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAM

- Set recruitment goals
- Develop a marketing plan - branding, outreach and partnership programs (career fairs, partnerships with workforce development groups)
- Create marketing materials (external or internal support system)
- Distribute marketing literature
- Monitor and evaluate your marketing and recruitment program

MONITOR AND EVALUATE THE PROGRAM

- Establish an accountability system, wherein policies and procedures are consistently examined and evaluated
- Establish close and consistent communication with knowledgeable apprenticeship organizations and officials, who will be able to monitor the progress and effectiveness of your program
- Establish methods by which to receive student feedback and evaluate student performance to measure program effectiveness

NATIONAL NETWORK OF BUSINESS AND INDUSTRY ASSOCIATIONS