

# Work-and-Learn: A Model for Building the 21st Century Workforce

DANE LINN | NOVEMBER 19, 2015 | 05:00 AM

Every day, we hear from America's business leaders on challenges of all shapes and sizes – but one issue remains a top priority: the skills gap. Our CEOs know that the health of their companies and, ultimately, of the economy relies on a workforce equipped with the skills and competencies needed to succeed in the jobs of today and tomorrow.

While the investments we can make to fill the talent pipeline take many forms, we recently talked to our member CEOs about work-and-learn. This innovative approach to on-the-job training is showing real success – and even greater potential – when it comes to effective ways to close the skills gap.

Here is just some of what CEOs told us about the power of work-and-learn:

“AT&T will only be as good of a company as the people we employ,” said AT&T Chairman and CEO and Chairman of Business Roundtable Randall Stephenson, whose company operates a number of innovative work-and-learn offerings. “We are using these programs to widen, develop and diversify the talent pipeline.” (Video)

“What we have found is the biggest gaps are in the new advanced manufacturing production processes,” said Chairman and CEO Andrew Liveris of The Dow Chemical Company, a company that depends on highly skilled talent to compete. “We’ve been going to community colleges and upgrading their curricula. We’ve been going to displaced workforces and high school graduates and retooling and reskilling them.” (Video)

“We have to turn really motivated, highly energetic, passionate folks into shipbuilders when they come in our gates,” said President and Chief Executive Officer Mike Petters of Huntington Ingalls Industries, describing the company's apprenticeship program at Newport News Shipbuilding. “We know this works, because the people we invest in stay with us.” (Video)

To better connect companies to the right training model and inspire them to take action, Business Roundtable, through the National Network of Business and Industry Associations, an effort we co-lead with ACT Foundation, just published *Work-and-Learn in Action*. This guidebook explores 15 innovative and successful models for incorporating work-and-learn programs into workforce development efforts. Business Roundtable members, including AT&T and Huntington Ingalls Industries, among others, are featured in the guide.

The solutions to the workforce challenges we face are complex – starting in the kindergarten classroom and extending long after high school graduation. That's why Business Roundtable is taking a multipronged approach to confront these issues head on.

We are a leading voice in urging policymakers to enact legislation to modernize and improve the U.S. education system and raise the bar for students and schools – from advocating strong accountability in the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* to calling for a modernized *Higher Education Act* to urging lawmakers to ensure career and technical education programs authorized under the *Perkins Act* are aligned with employer needs.

We're also building public-private partnerships to better connect what students are learning to what businesses need. Through our work with the Business Higher Education Forum, we're bringing together leaders from the business community and higher education to develop curricula in data analytics and financial services.

Just as the skills gap did not develop overnight, the solution to the challenges faced by employers will take time to come to fruition. At Business Roundtable, we are committed to moving the workforce of today – and of the future – forward.

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