

## Lunch Panel on Employer Engagement in Training ELs

Challenges, questions from audience:

- How to work with employers who have fixed ideas of immigrants, people who don't speak English well? How to demonstrate skills beyond degrees and certificates? Why are certain standards or criteria in place, can they be more flexible?
- What drives employers to the table? Ex long term investment in community, needs? What are incentives, levers, mandates for employers to engage?
- In a digital age, a lot of employers have online training, applications .... This may pose a challenge for recruitment and retention of ELs. How are you mitigating that problem?
- How to validate, recognize degrees, experiences from home countries?
- Our board administers TABE assessment and Work Keys – customers have skills but are basic skills deficient – what is more important for employer: academic or workforce skills? How can we navigate policy around that? Tension between working with people who have work related skills but are not scoring on basic skills assessment – how can we work with employers to recognize skills?

Response to last question:

- Stewart Knox: Depends on sector. Academic (basic) skills may be less important in manufacturing. Bring the conversation to a group of employers
- Natalie Roesler: determine needs with employers – are you willing to employ a certain group of people at x educational level? – answer might be yes. A lot of jobs are very prescriptive (in terms of skills requirements) but there may be other opportunities – determine if there is a pathway or a track to get people ready to meet job requirements.

Ursula: How does Kaiser view cultural competency? Benefits that bilingual employees bring to the organization?

- Natalie: Kaiser is a leader in diversity
  - Serving diverse demographics – meeting the needs of our customer base

Ursula: Are there specific careers or occupations that would be good fit for bilingual workers?

- Natalie - Recruit bilingual candidates for certain positions: ex. Bilingual clinics in SF (Mandarin, Spanish)

Ursula: Describe partnership between JVS and Kaiser. How did you develop the partnership?

- Abby Snay - Meeting a hiring need is the only strong driver of employer engagement. Starting point is always – what do employers need? Requires lots of careful listening
  - Start short-term, transactional
  - Move to future forecasting – what are future needs?
- The MA partnership was driven by the change in care from hospital-based care to primary care clinics. Kaiser is building out teams with lower cost positions – including MAs.
  - Started with partners in Sutter, then Kaiser and UCSF.
  - Hard to hire MAs, and especially retain them due to high cost of housing.
- We discovered in SF that there are plenty of MAs. The question is why were employers not hiring? Part of the answer is the changing role of MAs – more health coaching, not just taking BP. Requires different skill sets:
  - Advanced customer services
  - Ability to communicate with doctors
  - Problem solving on their own
  - Sending credible emails to docs and nursing
- Part of the response was to have the curriculum specialist shadow incumbent MAs.
- We designed a 5-week refresher curriculum, with a deeper dive on softer skills, followed up with on the job experiences.

Context and background regarding Kaiser’s situation in SF:

- 25% turnover in MA staffing due largely to high cost of living.
- We would put a lot of effort into hiring and they would transfer to a different one of the 22 Kaiser medical centers in Northern California after 6 months.
- 50 vacancies for MAs, really impacted care delivered.
- Knew about Sutter program.
- Liked that it was an accelerated program; we wanted to do it quickly.
- JVS has proven record at outreach. Kaiser wanted to ID people committed to living and working in SF.

What Works? -- Abby

- Being at table together, really listening. Developing trust.
- Great to have an instructor who had just retired from Kaiser as health educator.
- Key to success: Participant selection, based on employer insight from very beginning.
- Internship directly in the Kaiser clinic. Learned Kaiser way, gained internal advocates.

- Internal champions – Natalie (Nursing Director) and others pushing for system changes.

#### What Works – Natalie

- What worked was to take curriculum and customize:
  - Customer service
  - Professionalism
  - Environment of care
- Took participants in as part of the “Kaiser family”
- MD/MA pairing program. Enhances their practice together.
- Full experience what it would be like at Kaiser

#### Challenges – Natalie

- Attendance, set expectations early on.
- Be there and ready every day – long day, intensive program
- Computer skills. Not prepared to do the level of computer apps
- Math skills
- Labor-management partnerships: MAs are unionized. Had to work within contract. Series of conversations with labor partners about this.
- Role clarification: MA preceptors (mentors) needed to be trained. This was an opportunity for professional growth for incumbent MAs.

Question: How would you set up the program if you were starting again?

- Good thorough debrief at end of program
- More training up front
- United HC Workers – asked labor to come on board for preceptor training

Question: What is the role of workforce boards in setting up program like this? From a Workforce Development Board perspective: How to understand employers’ needs:

- Look at statistics: Mine the openings. What are jobs with high openings or unfilled month after month?
- Listen to employers, soft skills issues still coming up
- Populations with low literacy may still have strong work ethic – strong work ethic and skills but not enough English – advocate for them with employers
- Work with CBOs: understanding what communities workforce boards are not touching or not hearing about. CBOs play important role to connect with communities not typically served
- Abby: Important to be selective about what employers you work with – if high turn-over, there’s a reason. May not want to work with some employers.

Abby: Employer engagement takes time

Question - How might you help employers understand the talent that is available in ELs?

- Employers in service sector: business strategy reflects diversity of the community
- Upskilling workers to become employers, earn better wages
- Employers are interested in increasing bottom line

Q - Carmen: challenge of students not making living wage – challenge of approaching employers and talk about wages, feels like overstepping boundaries

- SK: CBOs providing wrap around services, provide some stipends
- See employees are family units – family self sufficiency