



March 18, 2021

## ***To Improve our Workforce, Businesses Must Expand Apprenticeships***

Jerry Haar

While so many of us are awaiting our first or second vaccine inoculation, Miami's entrepreneurial ecosystem has already received *three* shots in the arm. First, last December there was Miami Mayor Francis Suarez's "How can I help?" Twitter response to a query regarding bringing Silicon Valley to our city. These four words generated over 2 million organic impressions.

Then there is the Knight Foundation's \$10 million gift to FIU's School of Computing and Information Sciences to develop technical talent at scale to meet the demands of industry and Miamians seeking to advance their tech skills. Finally, in late February County Mayor Daniella Levine-Cava launched a new economic development initiative—RENEW305—to build up workers and businesses in the county and recruited SoftBank International CEO Marcelo Claure, developer Armando Codina, and former Miami Beach Mayor Philip Levine to extend the development work of the Beacon Council.

Within the competitive environment of urban economic development, our Achilles Heel always has been, or at least has been thought to be, "human capital". As with politics, perception is 90% of reality. Believe me, the human capital and the talent are here; regrettably, too many of our companies here and out of state do not bother to look hard enough.

All should recognize that we are in dire need of further building, maintaining and expanding a workforce to sustain a competitive advantage in our prime industries, especially knowledge-based ones. Outside of formal schooling, be it high school, two-year college, university or voc-tech schools, two excellent vehicles for improving the competitiveness of our workforce are *internships* and *apprenticeships*.

The former is plentiful and growing each year as more and more young people seek part-time work experience and companies require a cost-effective means of supplementing their labor force. Interns gain actual work experience and leverage the internship for post-graduation job opportunities. It enriches their résumés, it gives them a taste for the kind of work they may be contemplating, and it may boost their chances for a full-time position. The Beacon Council's Talent Development Network (TDN) is illustrative. Partnering with our local universities, TDN's portal statistics presently have a registry of 2733 students and 522 employers.

The downside of internships is that far too many are “occupational one-night stands”—there is no long-term commitment, expectations are misaligned, and the overall experience can be disappointing or forgettable. Apprenticeships, on the other hand, are in almost all cases a win-win situation for employer and *employee* (for that’s what an apprentice is).

One can boldly assert that apprenticeships are the coin of the realm for workforce development, offering substantial benefits to both workers and business. For workers it is a learn-as-you-earn model—real jobs—and a commitment from the employer where the business can impart the specific knowledge and tools it needs, tailored to the firm’s corporate culture. Additionally, while most apprenticeships do not require a college degree, apprenticeship training can earn college credit in many instances. Unquestionably, apprenticeships are an invaluable tool for developing a competitive workforce as they benefit both companies and workers and provide a pathway to middle-class jobs for those without a four-year college degree. In actuality, Miami-Dade College offers several apprenticeship programs, including one for those seeking to become customs brokers, under the tutelage of the Florida Customs Brokers and Freight Forwarders Association.

As more and more companies and workers flee East Coast locales, in particular, due to high taxes (income and property), crime, poor governance, and bad weather, Sunbelt states and municipalities will benefit increasingly. With this opportunity at our doorstep, it’s time for *all* businesses to get actively involved, not just our industry leaders. That means a more concerted effort to hire interns and give them meaningful work and to actually fund apprenticeships. Sunshine and the absence of a state income tax are not the magic formula to build and sustain competitiveness, human capital is.

The private sector should buy into the idea that we aspire to be one community with one major goal—to develop and sustain a quality workforce with competitive skills, high levels of productivity, and a sense of ethics and professionalism. To do less is to fall behind.

---

Jerry Haar is a professor of international business at Florida International University and a member of the working group on Work and Entrepreneurship of the Council on Competitiveness in Washington, D.C.