

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation Editor-in-Chief:

You are listening to Work in Progress. I'm Ramona Schindelheim, Editor-in-Chief of Working Nation. Work in Progress explores the rapidly changing workplace through conversations with innovators, educators, and decision-makers, people with solutions to today's workforce challenges. We've had apprenticeships at the US for a very long time. George Washington was an apprentice in surveying, Ben Franklin in printing, Paul Revere in silversmithing. Since then, apprenticeships have expanded to many occupations and sectors, and most recently, to healthcare and information technology. Apprenticeships deliver talent that employers need and offer alternative pathways for post-secondary education training that doesn't involve student debt, but the US is still lagging behind many other countries in the percentage of the workforce that are in apprenticeships. Joining me to talk about how to boost participation in these earn-and-learn opportunities is John Colborn, executive director of Apprenticeships for America. I start out by asking him to give a pitch to job seekers about why they might want to consider apprenticeships in their field.

John Colborn, Apprenticeships for America Executive Director:

First off, I would say an apprenticeship is a job. If you're the kind of person who's a little anxious to get started working, maybe you need a paycheck right away, maybe classroom experience just isn't really for you, maybe you're the kind of learner who really benefits from touching things, seeing things, and participating as opposed to just reading about something in a book, if you're that kind of person, an apprenticeship is perfect for you, you get a paycheck, which is different from most other kinds of educational programming. You have the benefit of somebody in the workplace, a mentor who's going to be working with you. You have the opportunity to grow with your employer. As your skills grow, your responsibilities grow. That's built into the apprenticeship.

It's not something you just have to hope for or ask for every couple of months as you're working for your boss. Then, finally, at the end of your educational program, you have a job because you've already had a job. That job continues, and so you don't have this question of, what am I going to do once I get my degree, once I finish my apprenticeship? You've been hired by your employer, and they've invested considerably in you, and so you now have the opportunity to remain with the employer and grow with them. Those are the kinds of things that I think people find attractive about apprenticeships. Then, I'll just say people have talked about apprenticeship as being college without the debt. It really is a post-secondary educational approach that is not linked to some of the challenges we have in the way that we pay for college in this country.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation Editor-in-Chief:

Okay. You've sold me on apprenticeships. I think it sounds like a good way to do this, and there's a lot of industries out there that are looking for workers. Where might I end up?

John Colborn, Apprenticeships for America Executive Director:

Statistically, the most likely place you might end up might be in the skilled trades, because that's where we have a lot of apprenticeships in this country, but increasingly, and in fact, in the last year, I think new apprenticeships in non-skilled trades occupations now outweigh new apprenticeships in the skilled trades, so there's actually a big sea change happening here. Increasingly, you'll find it in occupations as diverse as public school teacher, a registered nurse, software coding, cyber security, HR, certified public accounting. There's just a wide range of occupations that are out there available, that can be done through an apprenticeship.

One of the things I love to do every week is just watch new registered apprenticeship programs come through. One I saw the other week was a horse therapy clinician, and so there's really no limit to the kinds of occupations that might be accessible for apprenticeship. I think the challenge for somebody who's looking for an apprenticeship is, where do you find them? And we are not very good about having the right tools for people to do jobs searches around apprenticeship, but for most people, a good first place to go is going to be your state apprenticeship office, which often keeps a listing of all the companies that are hiring apprentices in the state

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation Editor-in-Chief:

For employers, as you said, this is a way to find labor and find talent. It may not yet be developed, but it is a way to find talent, and so employers have a very key role in this. Where have you seen the biggest growth outside of the skilled trades right now? Let's break it down a little bit.

John Colborn, Apprenticeships for America Executive Director:

Yeah, sure. So, I would say there are two or three areas that are really growing significantly. In the last year, one of the fastest growing areas has been for the public school teacher. If you know anything about public education, you know there's a crisis around hiring teachers, and yet it turns out that there's a lot of talent in every single school. They happen to be teachers aides or cafeteria workers. They know the students. They know what it is to work in a school, and the idea of using an apprenticeship structure to advance folks from these roles into a school teacher role has caught on across the states, and vast majority, 40-some states are now engaged in teacher apprenticeship of one sort or another. It's just one example, but there are other areas. In the area of information technology, we have seen apprenticeship take off in a field where it's less about what your degree is about and more about what you've done and what you know.

Knowing that the industry, the occupation, the folks who are hiring in these roles are really interested in portfolios and experience, the apprenticeship is very well tailored to that idea, because it's rooted in experience. Another area that is getting a lot of attention and exploration is an area where we have a huge hiring problem, and that's registered nurses. By the way, the registered nurse preparation is always involved in a workplace learning, a clinical experience. Now the question is, can we adjust some of the developmental processes around nurses to take that clinical experience and put it more into an apprenticeship context? In the area of business services, one of the biggest promoters we have of our apprenticeship out there right now is the American Institute for Certified Public Accounting. They are looking at apprenticeship is a way to take paraprofessional folks who don't have their CPA, but who have done an awful lot of work with CPAs and on CPA projects to advance them into CPA roles. It's across the board. Any occupation that requires some level of training and preparation is probably suitable for an apprenticeship.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation Editor-in-Chief:

So, how do we make the connection between that talent? I think one of your points is very well taken, and we've written, here at Working Nation, about the teacher apprenticeships, and how you've got a lot of people already in the school or for, as you said, the CPAs, having people who already have some of the skills needed, how do you recruit for apprentices outside of those infrastructures?

John Colborn, Apprenticeships for America Executive Director:

If you think of apprenticeships, there's kind of two pathways in. One is the sort of incumbent worker upgrade path, and that's the teacher story by and large, or the CPA story, but there's also the

opportunity to tap new markets. I think, in some ways, the IT story is that story that, actually, if you just relied on trying to recruit computer science majors, you'd be really stuck. There's very few of them. They're in very high demand, and so I think the hiring managers in that industry just said, "Look, there's a better way. There's people who are interested in this work, who have aptitude, who have maybe done some of this work themselves on the side, and now are looking to get into an occupation. Isn't there a way to do that?"

I will say, sometimes there's a direct placement into an apprenticeship program, and then sometimes there's a pre-apprenticeship process, so a workforce development organization, a community college, a workforce board might be supporting people to get ready for the apprenticeship, make sure they have the basic skills, they have some aptitude, they've got some career and workplace exposure so that when they get into the apprenticeship, they can move forward and know that they're on a career that is going to make sense for them.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation Editor-in-Chief:

There's a very big role in the federal government for encouraging this, the registered apprenticeship programs, and those have been growing and expanding. What do you see the continued role of the federal government in these apprenticeships?

John Colborn, Apprenticeships for America Executive Director:

We would say sort of twofold, so number one is we actually think that registered apprenticeship is a really strong basis for building an apprenticeship system, but that registration process could be made a little bit more user-friendly. We've actually done some reports on this and looked at how registration in the states and at the federal level can be off-putting as an experience to employers and to people who are trying to advance apprenticeship, so we think that there's room to grow in terms of improving the registration process, and what's more, we know it's possible, because we've been to states and talked with states that have taken on this issue and created a radically different experience for folks who are seeking apprenticeships.

For example, in Kansas, if I'm remembering right, they now do apprenticeship approvals in 15 days, whereas other states, you can be waiting months and even over a year to work through an apprenticeship process, so we know that that's possible. The second thing that we're really looking to the public sector for is a much bigger embrace of apprenticeship financially. In the United States, at the federal level, we spend about \$330 million to support apprenticeship, which sounds okay, but if you were to look at that, as compared to other countries and their investment apprenticeship, particularly countries that have significantly grown their apprenticeship numbers, this is really just a very, very small drop in the bucket. We have countries that spend 20, 60, and 100 times what we spend per capita on apprenticeship, and we really need to be looking at how we shift both the amount of money that's going into apprenticeship and then, frankly, the way it is being deployed.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation Editor-in-Chief:

Let's go back to the community college idea. There's a lot of workforce development programs, where employers reach out to the community and colleges to help them set up a program, and this idea that these are learn-and-earn. They can go to school, they can learn the program, they make money. Is there a degree component to that as well?

John Colborn, Apprenticeships for America Executive Director:

We actually did a little bit of a study on this. So, in the United States, community colleges are a critical part of the apprenticeship system, so sometimes they are contracted training by the apprenticeship sponsor, and are providing classroom instruction or other kinds of instruction to apprentices. Then, increasingly, especially in the last 10 years, we've seen an explosion of community colleges who are acting as sponsors of apprenticeships, which means that they're actually out, talking to employers, developing the apprenticeship idea, helping employers manage their apprenticeships. Soup to nuts, from recruiting the apprentice through supporting the apprentice in their workplace success. That growth in apprenticeships suggests to us that there's a lot more opportunity for community colleges.

We're quite bullish on the role of community colleges as apprenticeship intermediaries, and when we talk to a community, what they tell us is that they're already talking to employers about lots of different things, contracted training and hiring graduates from the community college. When they have one more thing that they can talk to employers about, "Oh, and we can do an apprenticeship for you," that just makes the sales call that much more impactful, because it gives them one more tool to help solve the problems or challenges that the employer is having. Now, you mentioned a really important question about connecting to degrees, and that is, in fact, another rapidly growing practice in the apprenticeship field, where we are finding apprentices being connected to bachelors or sometimes associate degrees, and we think there's good reason to do that for a couple of explanations.

Number one is that it does provide a paycheck for the student as they're working for their degree, so that seems to make sense. Number two, we know one of the big knocks that employers have around the traditional degree programs is people graduate without really any sense of what the workplace looks like or what the demands in a particular occupation look like. It's all been theoretical up until that point, and so when you connect an apprenticeship to a degree, you're really getting that workplace experience upfront, so that's helpful. Then, number three, we find that there are some degrees where there are opportunities for colleges and universities to be able to reach out to folks who might not have connected to a degree program and, through an apprenticeship program, are finding opportunities to secure that degree, and then set themselves up for further education and career advancement beyond the apprenticeship that they're working on.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation Editor-in-Chief:

One of the things that we talk about at Working Nation a lot is social capital and the exposure groups of people who have never had the exposure before, so say someone who said maybe, "I never thought of being a teacher or working in healthcare as a registered nurse," or for IT, to use some of your examples, how can a community expand that access and that opportunity to groups that may have never seen it before?

John Colborn, Apprenticeships for America Executive Director:

Yeah. I love that question, and I think it's one of the attractions of apprenticeship, because you are very much engaged. This is not a theoretical exercise. You're very much engaged in the workplace. You are building those relationships from day one. An important feature of an apprenticeship is that there's mentorship involved, so you have somebody in the workplace who is helping connect you to all those unwritten rules that are part of everybody's workplace, and so that you can navigate those and have success there. I think the other piece that you raised though is this question of, how do we expand the number of people who can find apprenticeship opportunities?

There is something very powerful in the pre-apprenticeship idea. Pre-apprenticeship programs can be rooted in community colleges, community organizations, workforce development boards. Lots of different organizations can do them. Then, there's many different design approaches to the pre-

apprenticeship. The only thing we would say at Apprenticeships for America is that you should have a real apprenticeship in mind as you are developing and operating those programs, and know that there are, in fact, spaces in the apprenticeship field for people that come through your program. We really don't want to see just another continuing sort of train and pray approach to workforce development under this new guise of pre-apprenticeship.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation Editor-in-Chief:

So John, what's next for apprenticeship in this country?

John Colborn, Apprenticeships for America Executive Director:

At Apprenticeships for America, we have big plans. We've actually set a big goal for our organization to grow apprenticeship eightfold over the next 10 years. That's a big, big growth curve for apprenticeship in the United States, but we also know that it's possible, because we've looked at other countries. We've looked at countries that have grown their apprenticeship systems in a deliberate way, and that kind of trajectory is very much achievable. So what will it take for us to get there? The first is we need to be sure we have the right institutions aligned around apprenticeships. We've talked about community colleges. They're going to be a central piece to this growth trajectory for apprenticeships. We think that some very measurable percentage of college enrollments 10 years from now will be on a co-op or apprenticeship basis, because we just think that's smart, that's what students want, that's what employers want.

Colleges and universities and community colleges are going to be going in that direction. The second thing is that we need an investment plan around apprenticeship, so we know that the United States significantly under-invests in apprenticeship, and so at Apprenticeships for America, we're working mightily to change that, and not only to change the amount of money that's going into apprenticeship, but also how that money is being deployed, and we argue for a sort of pay-for-success approach around apprenticeship. You place somebody in apprenticeship and you get a predictable funding to support that activity, and in that way, we move beyond the very important work that we've had up until now, which has been these sorts of time-limited grants, very hard to then plan a sustained program around those. Then, the last thing I'll just say is that we need to build the field of apprenticeship.

So, apprenticeship has largely been a set of operators who are working kind of on their own outside of the skilled trades, and so at Apprenticeships for America, one of the things we're very focused on is building a community of practice around apprenticeships. We've seen, in other countries, the growth of apprenticeship really depends on growing these sorts of apprenticeship solutions organizations, sometimes called apprenticeship intermediaries, to do this work. If we can do all of that, we think we can be the kind of organization that puts its apprenticeship system up against countries like England, France, Australia, and Canada, where the apprenticeship system is much more developed and understood as a key post-secondary educational pathway alongside the traditional college experience.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation Editor-in-Chief:

Sounds like big plans, but important ones.

John Colborn, Apprenticeships for America Executive Director:

You got it.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation Editor-in-Chief:

John, thank you for your time.

John Colborn, Apprenticeships for America Executive Director:

Great to be here.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation Editor-in-Chief:

That's John Colborn, Executive Director of Apprenticeships for America. I'm Ramona Schindelheim, Editor-in-Chief of Working Nation. Thank you for listening.