

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

You are listening to Work in Progress. I'm Ramona Schindelheim, editor-in-chief of WorkingNation. Work in Progress explores the rapidly changing workplace through conversations with innovators, educators and decision-makers, people with solutions to today's workforce challenges.

Analysis released by the World Economic Forum in January concludes that by 2030, 92 million jobs will be displaced, but the number of new jobs created will be almost double that in the same time period. And they predict that the United States will soon face the tightest labor market in more than six decades. This puts tremendous pressure on businesses to grow their workforces, and often those efforts require developing talent internally. Joining me today is Bijal Shah, CEO of Guild, which delivers customized workforce and skilling solutions. Our discussion is centered around the critical need for talent development, especially in the face of rapid technological changes. She starts by telling me how employers might use Guild to build critical roles.

Bijal Shah, Guild CEO:

So when you think about an education benefit, one of the things that Guild has prided itself in and continues to innovate and I believe lead the pack in how do we make sure that that education benefit isn't just a benefit, but it's a strategic opportunity for employers to help ensure that they're investing in their employees in a way that's aligned to the jobs that may be available in the future. So we see all kinds of employers using what Guild does to help fill hard to fill in critical roles by developing the talent that's inside of their organization because they know they can't go find the talent they need externally.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

And I like the idea that it's not just about the company. So it's not just about the specific companies there, but it's arming people with skills that can benefit them and benefit society and the economy as a whole. So right now, what kind of training are you seeing your partners offer?

Bijal Shah, Guild CEO:

We see a wide gamut of training. Everything from helping you get the foundational skills you need, things like even English language learning to help you ensure that you can be effective in the workplace all the way through very specific skills. So we run programs that help folks who are trying to become frontline healthcare workers, actually go through the certification process, get the skilling that they need, get the licensure that they need to actually turn into a frontline medical worker.

We are working with some innovative manufacturing companies in the US. And when you think about one of the areas where there's an impending huge labor shortage, especially given the macro environment we're in now where we're trying to bring jobs back to the US, that means we have a skilled labor shortage, and manufacturing in particular is already feeling that crunch. So how do we help make sure that we have skilled labor in high-tech manufacturing that allows people to understand how to ride alongside technology, how to enable that technology to be building things like chips inside the United States, to be building electric vehicles inside the United States and to be building things that are important to sustaining our future economy.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

One of the things that employers are also saying is while these really hard skills are important, those durable soft skills are also important. And I think I recall that you're doing some of that type of education training as well.

Bijal Shah, Guild CEO:

That's right. So we do it in two different ways. One is in our traditional learning marketplace, we offer programs that are very focused on how do you get the durable skills that you need. We work with some of the most innovative institutions in the country to help bundle and create packages of durable content to teach things like problem solving, creative thinking, help you understand how to do communications better. But then we recently acquired a company called Nomadic and have a new product line inside of Guild called an academy. And these academies are cohorted learning opportunities where you are doing hands-on problem solving with cohorts of individuals to try and build the skillsets you need that are applicable to the employer you are at currently to help enable you.

But in the process of going through things with a cohort and actually having live application of problems to solve, you're learning problem solving real time, you're learning how to work with other people real time, you're learning how to ask for help when you need help. You're learning communication skills with other humans. So I think there's a lot of benefit to those type of capability academies and our ability to help enable either leaders or specific cohorts of employees who might be needing to be upskilled in a very specific way, either in a procurement organization or on the manufacturing side of the organization. So we're really excited and bullish about that product as well.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

No conversation in this world right now in this place can exist without the conversation around AI. Are you finding that your employers are saying, "We need you to help us train up these workers for those skills." And maybe give me an anecdote on how it's being applied.

Bijal Shah, Guild CEO:

So we definitely are seeing employers ask us for help with getting AI content accessible to their broad employee population. We do it at Guild in a very interesting way where we've created bundles that are targeted to specific populations. So AI essentials that the broad employee population could take advantage of, AI for leaders so that if you're a leader, you can contemplate how can I utilize AI or get my workers to utilize AI to help better enable the business outcomes I'm trying to drive. We have a leading financial institution that utilizes their education benefit for Guild in order to drive actual AI skilling inside and across their entire organization. And over the last year, they saw 1000% increase in adoption of AI. And you can imagine the base is small from where they're starting because 18 months ago or two years ago, people weren't really talking about this type of adoption.

I think the other interesting thing, Ramona, is I've heard many people say, "Well, when people started using search engines, we didn't have to train them in search engines. Why do we have to train them in AI and utilizing AI?" And I think the technology we're talking about and the type of delivery it can provide and enhancements it can provide for you if loaded with the right data, if optimized in the right way, is so powerful that actually it requires training. And today the models aren't perfect. So you also need to learn how to be an editor-in-chief. You need to look at the output that comes out of AI and realize, "Oh, it's making a mistake on math, or it actually doesn't have the full context of my business." So it does require oversight.

So there are a lot of reasons why it's really important for people to get trained on how to utilize it, where do we incorporate it? What are the best problems to be solving with AI today versus two years from now versus five years from now? So I do think it's pretty different than people just trying to use a search engine. And I do get disappointed when I see leaders say, "I'm not sure why I have to train people on this because we didn't have to train them on search engines."

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

Interesting you say that. I had a conversation with Roddy Bolden, he's with Morgan Stanley at work, and Roddy was telling me that very thing about there's questions on the employer side, but there's also questions on the employee side and trying to figure out how their bosses want them to use it. So I think it's very important that they get that hands-on training, but then that the bosses say to them, "This is how we want to use it."

Bijal Shah, Guild CEO:

Yeah. I also think peer learning is so important when you think about AI and making sure that best practices that folks inside your organization are utilizing are disseminated to other parts of the organization. So if I just put my Guild CEO hat on, some of our best practices around doing this is how do you find folks inside the organization who are utilizing this really well? And then how do you turn them into champions to help other people see the benefit, especially not in their own organization of AI? And how do you make sure people are thinking about the right ways to be utilizing it and the best problems it could be solving for your business today, and those are going to change. AI is evolving so rapidly, the models are getting so much better. I just played around with deep research over the last week and its ability to go deep on a problem and produce research that helps you frame the problem you're trying to solve and give you solutions. It's going to be pretty revolutionary.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

Do you find that the employees that are benefiting from this training, are they afraid?

Bijal Shah, Guild CEO:

I think once you realize what it's doing and how it's enhancing your abilities, people aren't afraid. I think that they are mesmerized in some ways, and I think you're a little bit apprehensive about what this means for the future. How much better will this get? Exactly what will it replace relative to what I'm doing today? How do I make sure I maximize my ability to leverage it and work alongside it are the types of things I see those who are more advanced in how they use it asking the questions they're asking.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

For those who aren't familiar with Guild and the way you work, can you explain to the audience how you create those programs and are they specific for a specific company?

Bijal Shah, Guild CEO:

So we think of ourselves as a company who is trying to help upskill and re-skill America. And we have a suite of products that we call the Guild Talent Advantage. And what we end up doing is going inside of employers, having conversations with CHROs, chief talent officers, VPs of HRs, VPs of benefits and VPs of L&Ds to talk about the biggest problems they see inside their workforces. Sometimes they don't exactly know what problems are going to come around the corner. So we have tools in our toolkit to help you better understand how's your workforce going to evolve. And then the bread and butter of what Guild does is to actually work with specific employers and to design a very tailored set of programs and a catalog that works for the business strategy that that employer is trying to solve.

So we work with a ton of retailers, a ton of healthcare providers. We work with a lot of folks in manufacturing. It's actually one of our largest growing sectors, manufacturing, transportation, and logistics. And when you kind of think about the problems inside this country and where there are labor

issues, you can understand why that is one of the fastest growing verticals for us. So with each of these sectors and even inside of these sectors, the problems that each of these employers face given their geographies, what their workforce makeup is, what the predominant jobs are, look very different. So our goal is to design a very tailored solution for that specific employer.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

And are the courses, the training, do they take place online, all of it online, or are there any in-person components?

Bijal Shah, Guild CEO:

Yeah, there are in-person components. So we optimize our learning for working adult learners. That is the population that we are most focused on. So any kind of asynchronous and online learning you can do is just really helpful when you think about the flexibility that these individuals need, when you think about the fact that they sometimes work on nights and weekends and they don't usually have traditional hours or traditional jobs. That said, because we do skilling and because we are actually trying to drive mobility opportunities inside of employers, there are times when a role or a specific opportunity requires hands-on, we call it applied learning, which is you now need the practice of actually taking what you've learned in an online setting or an in-person setting, and you need to be able to apply that to actually get that practical knowledge and the skills to then go get a licensure or even to complete your programming.

So there are cases where it is hybrid programming and someone has to go into a local facility to get the hands-on training to become a phlebotomist. You're not going to remove that part of the process. So we try to make sure we find programs that are optimized for working adult learners. And just depending on the type of program you enroll in and what's required, if you want to become an electrician, you can't do that whole program online. There's a component of hands-on learning that is required. So we try to make sure that we can meet the learner where they are and that they get the best learning based on the modalities that are important to actually ensuring that you've got the skills you need.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

Interesting you mentioned phlebotomist because I had seen that in the past couple of years that that was something that can be partially trained online, but you really need that practical experience.

Bijal Shah, Guild CEO:

Yeah. I would say there's a lot of roles in healthcare that require that last, we call it last mile training, which is hands-on training that allows you not to only get the technical skills to be able to pull blood, but things like bedside manners and understanding how to calm the patient down and deal with the human aspects of someone who's coming in and might be scared to draw their blood. And then when you think about even in manufacturing, if you went through all the curriculum and then got placed in front of a machine but didn't know exactly how to service that machine can be super scary. So making sure you have that hands-on learning.

We also have employers who do really innovative things to provide that type of last mile training inside of their own organizations. So we work with them really closely to say, "Here's where you are today. You've now finished the online components of the things you need to do. Here's the next component that's going to happen on the job for you inside of your employer, and we're going to track that you've completed it and that you're done and now you can get your licensure."

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

And you've mentioned manufacturing. It is growing back. I know that with the Bipartisan Infrastructure and Jobs Act that there was a lot of construction that had gotten underway over the last couple of years since it was signed. And I'm told by the manufacturing institute that one of their studies shows that it's going to be like 3.8 million jobs that need to be filled, not only because of the changing technology and the new construction, but also we have an aging workforce, so people are retiring. So if you can start bringing people through and attract them by saying, "Hey, you can learn this and we'll show you how." And I think it's very appealing, again, to try to attract that talent.

Bijal Shah, Guild CEO:

I think that's totally right. I got to see a talk by HBS Professor Joe Fuller, and he has this really great slide that he shows around what the jobs of the future are going to require. And he says they're either high social or high math, or they are high social and low math. So I think that is so telling for where the world is headed in terms of you're going to have highly skilled jobs and either they're going to be skilled trade jobs and they're going to be a ton of them, which is what you just talked about, Ramona, in terms of as manufacturing comes back to the US as healthcare continues to be an important thing with an aging population, these are the types of things where you're going to need skills trades and workers who understand how to do application of skills trades, or you're going to need people who are really good at things like math, but also have the communication skills to be able to translate that into helping solve problems, lead workforces, motivate and inspire both individuals and maybe agents in the future.

So there's just a lot of disruption happening, but I found his visual on that to be so spot on with how I think about where jobs are going in the future. And I think the other thing is we have to become a society that loves to learn. And I see all of this debate around should you get a degree? Should you not get a degree? Should you focus on this? Should you not focus on that? And the thing for me that is most important is can you learn to learn? That is the most critical skill that we will require because if AI actually revolutionizes the way that we work, the half-life of skills is just going to continue to get shorter and shorter and shorter, which means your ability to stay relevant in the workforce means you need agile learning and you need agility in your learning capacity to be able to actually keep up with what's happening.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

And a good shout out to Joe, he's a good friend of ours here at WorkingNation, and he is actually on our advisory board. I love hearing him tell us what's going on. Now he's got his finger on the pulse on that one for sure. And for Guild, what's next? Is there any type of skills training that's on the horizon that we need to know about as workers, learners and employers?

Bijal Shah, Guild CEO:

I'm super excited. One of the things that we pride ourselves in at Guild is taking the time to listen to our customers being a steward of bringing together policy advocates as well as economists and those who are studying the future of work to try and understand how we can make sure that we have the skilling content and the educational content that's required to help employers keep up with the future of work and to help their employees. So from my perspective, I think what you'll see out of Guild in the next year or two are a few things. One is the problem that we see in the United States isn't just a US problem, it's a global problem. And as we think about the problems we're able to solve in the US, we are very focused on many of the employers we work with are multinationals, which means they have employees in other

countries, and they're also trying to figure out how to upskill and reskill those employees. So you'll see us continue to expand our footprint in that way.

The second is I believe that because of where the world is headed in terms of skills trades, you're going to see us do more and more and helping to enable skills trades at scale, and ensuring that we're working with local institutions to help enable that, that we bring to bear our marketplace model to help allow that to happen and ensure that we create the modularity that employers need so that their employees can get the hands-on training that they need to.

The last place I think you'll see us innovate in particular is we believe that there's a lot of really great content and academic institutions inside this country that needs to get in the hands of workers today, but not in the form of master's degrees or not in the form of long-form degrees, but where specific courses on lean manufacturing, on EVs, on how to think about electrical component parts as you're thinking about building things out are going to be really critical. So we are pushing and innovating with our academic institutions on how do we bring that to bear in a way that's more palatable for the employer as well as their employee, which I'm super excited about.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

Bijal, thank you very much.

Bijal Shah, Guild CEO:

Thank you, Ramona.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

I've been speaking with Bijal Shah, the CEO of Guild. I'm Ramona Schindelheim, editor-in-chief of WorkingNation. Thank you for listening.