

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. More inclusive hiring is a powerful way to break the cycle of poverty for many Americans. When people are given a fair opportunity to participate in the workforce, our economy and our society are stronger.

For the 70 million people in this country who have been touched by the justice system, having a criminal record often makes it harder for them to find employment. The Second Chance Business Coalition, an initiative of the Business Roundtable, is committed to expanding opportunities to jobs, careers, and upward mobility for this population. Dane Linn is the Business Roundtable Senior Vice President of Corporate Initiatives.

Dane Linn, Business Roundtable SVP:

First, let me say we're talking about more people than those who've been in jail. Some of these individuals have a minor offense and that minor offense has crippled their ability to seek any employment opportunity. I think what has been most compelling for the members of the Second Chance Business Coalition and we're on our fourth year with 52 large companies, we've had like an 80% growth in the number of companies that have joined, I think there's not just interest in the topic, but there's interest in hiring individuals with records because we've all been given second chances.

When you talk about it that way with employers, you may not have a criminal record, but some point along the way you've been given a second chance.

And we illuminate or illustrate that idea by bringing in individuals to the convening like the one we had a couple of weeks ago with UVA's Darden School of Business, where we have individuals who actually have a criminal record and to hear about the struggles they've had, but also the opportunities that an employer took a chance on them and gave them an opportunity to have a job and what that meant to them and the contributions they've made.

So we've really attempted to make the case that we all deserve a second chance. Beyond making the case, I think what's been critical to the work and the success of the coalition is to provide the tools and the resources to companies so that they can figure out, how do we operationalize that? What are the ideas? How do I eliminate the box where I have to check that I have a criminal record?

How do I overcome the regulatory barriers that may be real or they may be a myth that I can't work in a company like JPMorgan Chase? So we're attempting to provide real ideas, solutions that they can implement in their companies.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

Do you have an example of maybe one of those solutions? Maybe it's how HR approaches it and how they approach the individuals who come in for those job opportunities.

Dane Linn, Business Roundtable SVP:

Well, one is the idea of ban the box. Do we really need to? And if you don't ban the box, how do you ensure that an individual is given equal consideration as you move through the process of evaluating a resume, evaluating a candidate based on an interview? And then maybe if they're the final three candidate, you do the background check, but you don't eliminate them from consideration of the job.

That's one changeable way. The second idea is how do we ensure that in our recruitment efforts that HR is looking to a lot of different places where they can recruit talent. That it's not just about going to the same five places to find the talent and ending up with the same supply problem you had before you started to look for the talent. So how do you expand the places you go to?

I think for example, the church that I went to actually had a second chance clinic where we brought in 30 to 40 employers, many of whom were offered a job on the spot. So where are the non-traditional places that you can go to to look for talent? And they're not always about poaching from other employers. They're not always about just going to the two-year and the four-year schools. Go to the nonprofits. Go to the churches. Go to other organizations that know and work with this population.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

A lot of employers have been saying that they're having a hard time finding enough talent in general, and it seems like this is a good opportunity for a business to look at an untapped talent pool. What is your pitch to the businesses when it comes to, "Hey, this benefits you as well?"

Dane Linn, Business Roundtable SVP:

To put a finer point on the supply problem, we have 7.7 million open jobs today. We have declining birth rates and a number of other factors that indicate to us this is not a today problem. This is going to be a problem over the next several 10, 15 years. So we are encouraging companies to have a long-term strategy to recruiting talent.

The second issue where we see a significant amount of action is not relying on the two and the four-year degree, where an individual with criminal records may possess the requisite skills from the previous jobs and experiences that he or she has had, including training in prisons where there's a lot of skills training going on, but how do we open the aperture to individuals with records by eliminating the two and the four-year degrees?

We're not saying throw the two and the four-year degrees out the window, but we're saying take a hard look at the job descriptions. Do the skills that you're requiring an individual to possess in order to succeed on the job really require them to have a two or four year degree? And if not, eliminate it.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

I agree with that, and we've talked to a lot of people here for WorkingNation about the skills first hiring idea. Finding ways for an HR department, a hiring manager to apply that has been a challenge, I think. Because a lot of times if you get 500 people applying for one job, there's sometimes an algorithm that eliminates some people who don't have degrees. And I think trying to find better ways to do that not only benefits a company, but benefits people like we are talking about here, formerly incarcerated or people touched by the justice system in general.

Dane Linn, Business Roundtable SVP:

I think there's an opportunity to work with the small universe of companies who create those algorithms, many of whom are contractors to, at least the case of the Business Roundtable, provide those services to the HR departments. So how do we influence those contractors who build those algorithms to create algorithms that are fairer to the population of individuals with criminal records?

I think there's a lot of opportunity there. The second thing I think is important aside from the algorithms is that there are individuals with criminal records who may not have had the same job title working at

company A from company B, but the knowledge, skills, and experiences from company A are transferable.

So how do we begin to recognize the transferability of those knowledge and skills so that an individual gets credit and is given equal consideration and hopefully ends up with a job as much as someone else who has worked for the company for six years?

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

This is not just good for an individual business or an individual, but it's good for the overall economy, because I do remember reading in some of your material that incarceration costs the American taxpayer more than 80 billion a year.

Dane Linn, Business Roundtable SVP:

That's right.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

And that's a lot of money. And some of that is in housing those who are incarcerated, but that's also tax-based for a community. That's local, state, and federal taxes that are not being collected because people are not actively working in a job or a career.

Dane Linn, Business Roundtable SVP:

You're absolutely right. I mean, the cost to the US economy, some estimate between 78 and \$87 billion is not insignificant. But let's make no mistake about it, this Second Chance Business Coalition is not just a charitable endeavor. This is a business imperative for companies to meet the supply problem they have. It's important to provide individuals with an equal opportunity to work in Corporate America and advance in Corporate America.

And it's important to ensure our ability as a country to maintain our economic competitiveness and in some cases not have individuals depend on public assistance in some cases for which they don't want to depend on. They want to be contributing members to society just as much as anyone else, and giving them an opportunity to work in Corporate America is one way to do that.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

The other thought I had on the individual is that these barriers to employment also create a bigger chance of recidivism. If you can't find a good job and integrate into the community, I think the number is pretty astounding, I think it's two-thirds of those who have been incarcerated have returned to prison. I think that has a lot to do with not being able to find a good job based on what we've learned from the people we have talked to. Is that what you have also learned?

Dane Linn, Business Roundtable SVP:

I could not agree more, Ramona. I would just add that for those individuals who have spent time in prison, that when they are released, they're in many cases being released without a birth certificate, without housing, without the social security number or any form of ID. Why would we expect any different that individuals with no support system in place, let alone the vital documents to confirm their identity would resort to previous behaviors.

So we really need to think through whether it's the Federal Bureau of Prisons or other mechanisms, and you look at some of the work that states like Oklahoma have done and Governor Stitt, who have made significant progress in reducing the incarceration rate in that state, and there are a couple of others as well. So where the federal government is falling short, states are making up the difference. And it's critical. Otherwise, the dog will continue to chase the tail.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

We've heard from a lot of nonprofits as well which are offering some of those support. That whole thing on the documentation, that was a surprise to me when I heard that during one of our previous conversations with a group a few months ago, that people come out not having those, as you said, birth certificates or social security numbers, and then not knowing even how to get them because there is no support in place for them. Once they leave the prison, they're forgotten by the federal prison system.

Dane Linn, Business Roundtable SVP:

The lucky ones find a nonprofit or someone advocating on behalf, or there's a local nonprofit in Chicago that has significant outreach with the prison system, but it is dependent on individuals and nonprofits on whether or not an individual successfully transitions back into their communities.

I think that's why the Second Chance Business Coalition is working with groups like Envoy and our partners at the Society for Human Resource Management, the Pivot Program, which I'm sure you've heard about over Georgetown and other universities around the country, and others to how do we do what I call link and leverage. No one organization can solve this problem alone either at the national level or at the local level.

The interactive map is connecting people with employers to help individuals secure employment. That's just employment. But hopefully the interactive map allows the state Business Roundtables, the companies in our region or other nonprofits to connect, one, to have bigger impact, but even before you get to have bigger impact, to connect the ways in which they could work together to ensure a successful transition of individuals from prison.

But also helping those individuals who have a record may not have been in prison. How do we help them put on a path to additional education and training? For example, how do we help them find basic literacy classes if that's the challenge they face, or counseling or mental health services. It's really important for us to figure out how do we link and leverage our specific areas of focus so that we can have more long-lasting impact.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

I think another important point too that I've learned, I wish I could remember the study right now, but it showed that employers who were surveyed who have hired through a second chance hiring program or just hired on their own and given people a second chance find that those employees are as good or even better than some of the other employees because there was a dedication to wanting to have this career, this job, and they're working hard to make it work for themselves.

Dane Linn, Business Roundtable SVP:

Again, I couldn't agree with you more. That same study, which I too am unable to quote at this very moment, also indicates that the retention rates for individuals with criminal records is much higher than those individuals who don't have a record. In this market where there's a supply problem and individuals

are jumping from one employer to the next every couple of years, those individuals with criminal records tend to stay longer.

And when you stayed longer and you're rewarded for performance, you not only have a job, but you get the next better job and the next better job. That's upward mobility.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

What is the feedback from all these organizations, these companies, big companies who have said, "I want to be a part of this," what are they telling you?

Dane Linn, Business Roundtable SVP:

One is everyone deserves an equal shot at having a good career, which provides a life-sustaining wage and opportunities for advancement. Secondly, there's the economic. There's this imperative. Companies have a supply problem. They can't find the talent they need. There are some jobs... I was reading over the weekend, a report out about some of the Gen Z population.

They don't want to do the hard jobs. Young individuals, they don't want to do the factory jobs. And quite frankly, individuals with a criminal record are happy to take any opportunity. And I'm not suggesting that individuals with records could only, should only take the factory jobs. That is not what I mean. But there are great high-skilled, high-paying jobs in those careers and companies are looking to fill those jobs.

And this is a population that will take any opportunity. They can get blue collar, white collar. You name it. So I think those are probably the two primary reasons. For those that have been hiring individuals with records, they're very happy with results. And when you get good results from something you've been focused on, you're going to do more of it.

And so for the companies like Radius Recycling or JPMorgan Chase or Eaton Corporation, when you're at 5% one year and you're keeping those individuals and they're great employees, you're eventually going to go up to 7% of hiring individuals with records. And I think Eaton is now at 10%. Radius Recycling is at around 10%, as is JPMorgan Chase. And the more we can show what it looks like to hire in advance individuals with criminal records from their peer companies, more will do it.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

So in the four years since you started Second Chance Business Coalition, what is the change that you've seen?

Dane Linn, Business Roundtable SVP:

Great question. Let me point to two data points that I think are important for your audience to know, because we have quantifiable results in which is a demonstration that this effort through the Second Chance Business Coalition is not lip service. The first of those data points is that over 80% of the companies who participate in the Coalition review candidates individually without hard stops on certain conviction types.

And the second is that nearly two-thirds, 60% partner or contract with reentry or other organizations to administer the hiring or the support programs for employees with criminal backgrounds. I think that's pretty impressive for four years, those two data points. Change doesn't happen quickly, any of us who've been involved in it.

So we're looking to grow those numbers as much as we're looking to grow the number of companies like Eaton, Radius Recycling, JPMorgan Chase, and others who actually publicly report the number of individuals with criminal records that now work at their company.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

Well, congratulations on that success, and we wish you even greater success in the coming years.

Dane Linn, Business Roundtable SVP:

Thank you for having me.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

That was my conversation with Dane Linn, Senior Vice President of Corporate Initiatives for the Business Roundtable. I'm Ramona Schindelheim, editor-in-chief of WorkingNation. Thank you for listening.