Industry Leaders Offer Insights into Creating Effective Talent Pipelines

Effective talent pipelines are critical to business and community success. They not only ensure a continuous supply of skilled workers but can reduce recruitment costs, improve the quality of hires and contribute to the overall development of a community.

The Partnership's May 7 Talent Talk focused on the best practices and strategies to develop and manage workforce pipelines to better meet the region's workforce needs today and in the future. Tami Bradley, senior strategic advisor of talent and workforce development for the Partnership, laid out the foundation for the Talent Talk, explaining it is a continuation of the Partnership's Talent Workshops in 2023.

Cargill Protein - North America Human Resources Vice President Beth Carlson then followed Bradley and welcomed 70 industry leaders, education officials and human resource professionals to the event at Cargill Protein Headquarters downtown. "Our organizations can only grow as much as we grow our talent," emphasized Carlson.

Talent Pipeline and Recruitment Panel

Ricki Ellison, director of talent, workforce development and community engagement for the Partnership, moderated a talent pipeline and recruitment panel. Panelists discussed how their prospective companies are cultivating and maintaining strong talent pipelines.

Panelists included:

- Brandi Booher, assistant vice president of Human Resources with Cargill Protein - North America

- Keith Lawing, president and CEO of Workforce Alliance of South Central Kansas
- Ryan Rowley, director of operations with Hutton
- Tonya Sudduth, head of U.S. strategy for Bombardier
- Michelle Moe Witte, attorney partner at Martin Pringle Law Firm

Key takeaways:

- **Acknowledge the barriers** to talent recruitment and retention, and offer the access and opportunities needed
- **Provide internships,** particularly for high school students
- **Support STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math)** learning
- **Give** internal champions **content** to share with their own social media audiences
- **Start earlier** (middle school or even younger) to highlight career pathways
- Remember that **culture and community count**; create a competitive advantage by increasing soft skills, being involved in the community, living your company values
- Create partnerships and **provide flexibility** to address challenges like childcare
- Retain and/or bring back **experienced** team members to be **mentors**

"Retirements are creating experience gaps," shared Michelle Moe Witte, partner at Martin Pringle Law Firm and 2024 SHRM Wichita president elect. "People are our best resource so showing up and engaging in these (talent) discussions is critical."

Some say the fastest growing demographic in the workforce today is 75-year-olds. Both Bombardier and Hutton create coaching opportunities for older employees to pass down their trade to younger generations.

"This age group holds our best advocates," shared head of U.S. strategy for Bombardier Tonya Sudduth, "and we need them to pass on their pride and expertise to future generations."

At the same time, younger, front-line employees are critical to growth.

"Our technicians are setting the pace for our entire organization's growth and we need more of them," Sudduth said. "One of the greatest assets Wichita has is our ability to work together, especially as we address talent."

Brandi Booher, assistant vice president of Human Resources with Cargill Protein North America added: "Creating the right culture means these experts won't want to leave so being flexible with how you create opportunities for them matters.

How the newest generation learns is evolving as well. Ryan Rowley, director of operations at Hutton, has many opportunities

to work with schools. “Kids are watching videos on You Tube then practicing skills in real time. We once had a superintendent speak to second graders about the construction that was happening at their school. It was so insightful to let those kids know what to expect but also to expose them to construction as a trade so early.”

Panelists agreed that starting earlier in the process is best. President and CEO of Workforce Alliance of South Central Kansas, Keith Lawing added, “We are constantly talent mining in Wichita. We need to connect young people by offering internships and on-the-job training.” Workforce Alliance is also making deliberate efforts to retain those transitioning to civilian life from McConnell Air Force Base and other military installations, and has helped 16 local companies become Skillbridge organizations to help with that process.

Overall, differentiating your organization is key. “Culture and community count with young talent,” emphasized Martin Pringle’s Witte. “They want to connect with you and your brand. Don’t underestimate the importance of instilling soft skills, upskilling, engaging in heartfelt community work and living by your company values.”

Brand Ambassadors have also helped companies such as Cargill reduce recruitment costs and increase brand awareness with results that are irrefutable. After one year of the program, Cargill’s organic impressions have increased 204% using LinkedIn and Facebook. More than 400 current Cargill employees have reached over four million people with their organic content, 24% above the industry benchmark.

Finally, successful companies need to acknowledge the challenges. We can't just say "we are open" and expect talent to come, according to the experts. Instead, we may have to provide transportation to get students into programs and address challenges such as access to and affordability of childcare.

Closing:

"We must continue to bring education and industry together to meet workforce demands," explained Partnership President Jeff Fluhr. "Today's discussion is another step in pursuing the goals of our Talent Roadmap which points a way forward for

the region to compete for, retain and develop talent in innovative ways."

The event was presented by the Partnership, Workforce Alliance of South-Central Kansas and Cargill. There are two more Talent Talks planned for 2024. Additional resources from this Talent Talk can be found under **Workforce Pipeline Resources**.