

How Apprenticeships Are Changing Lives and Strengthening Workforces



In an economy marked by rapid technological change and shifting workforce demands, apprenticeships are proving to be one of the most effective ways to connect people with promising careers—and connect employers with the skilled talent they need. At the heart of this transformation are stories of personal growth, professional development, and innovative partnerships.

A Career Reset That Works

For many, apprenticeships offer a second chance—or even a first real chance—at a meaningful career. Salima Coaxum, who once felt “burnt out” in a stagnant job, made a bold leap through apprenticeship.

“Making any sort of change is anxiety-provoking... but this group made me feel like I really made the right choice.”

Jon Thomas shared a similar journey, transitioning out of a decade-long career into something completely new.

“This apprenticeship has given me so many wins... I’ll always appreciate this and share it with others considering this path.”

These stories show that apprenticeships aren’t just about learning; they’re about rediscovering purpose and potential.

A Strategic Solution for Employers

Employers are increasingly turning to apprenticeships not only to meet talent needs but also to invest in long-term workforce development. Apprenticeship programs offer hands-on training tailored to specific organizational goals, and the results speak for themselves.

Terence West of Per Scholas noted:

“For every dollar invested in an apprenticeship program, organizations see an average return of \$1.47. It’s a cost-effective talent pipeline.”

Claire Ross of Miller Electric shared how her company scaled its apprenticeship model to support 70 entry-level project managers.

“It’s empowering these young people to learn both technical skills and what it means to be a professional.”

Partnerships That Make It Possible

Employers don’t have to go at it alone. Intermediary organizations help design, launch, and manage apprenticeship programs. These partners bring expertise in navigating government regulations, creating curriculum, and providing practical tools.

Jessica Randall of Drexel University said partnering with AIR made all the difference:

“Without that apprenticeship-specific feedback and dedicated time, building programs like this would be incredibly challenging.”

Carlos Vazquez from Miami EdTech appreciated the practicality AIR brought to the table:

“There are toolkits and PDFs you can plug into your business model... not just theory.”

The Power of AIR and the “Source & Grow” Approach

AIR supports apprenticeship growth through its Source & Grow program, helping employers across industries design and scale registered programs. Their work enables more organizations to hire and retain apprentices in high-demand fields, bridging gaps in the workforce and boosting economic mobility.

“With apprenticeship, employers gain tailored talent—and apprentices gain a new lease on life.”

The Bigger Picture: Economic Mobility

One of the most inspiring impacts of apprenticeships is their ability to open doors for non-traditional candidates. Whether it’s a former line cook, a social worker, or an Army military police, these individuals bring valuable life experience to new roles in IT, project management, and more.

Jim Snyder of the Federal Reserve Board of St. Louis shared,

“Seeing people transition into tech from unexpected backgrounds—and thrive—is incredibly rewarding.”

Chris Young from ACI captured the heart of apprenticeship when he said,

“It’s about more than certification. It’s about creating thriving careers for individuals and their families.”

Key Takeaways

- **Apprenticeships offer hands-on, paid learning** that leads to industry-recognized credentials and full-time employment.
- **Over 90% of apprentices** are hired by their employers after completing the program.
- **Employers see ROI**—on average, \$1.47 return for every dollar invested.
- **Support systems are essential**, with intermediaries and partners like AIR guiding the way.
- **Apprenticeship is a powerful tool for economic mobility**, especially for people without traditional education or career paths.

Apprenticeships are more than training programs – they’re bridges to opportunity. With the right support, individuals and organizations alike can thrive in today’s dynamic workforce. Whether you’re an employer seeking skilled talent or an individual looking to shift gears, apprenticeship might just be your path forward.

ABOUT AIR

Founded in 1946, AIR is a leading not-for-profit institution specializing in social policy research, evaluation, and technical assistance. Our Employment and Economic Opportunity Program (EEOP) focuses on the full employment cycle, including workforce readiness, recruitment, selection, performance management, and training. We are dedicated to improving employment and life outcomes for all people.

AIR has been integral to the U.S. apprenticeship ecosystem for over 15 years, collaborating with states to expand apprenticeship programs and serving as a national apprenticeship intermediary.

Our evidence-building, systemic improvement, and change management efforts aim to contribute to economic vitality, future-readiness, and resiliency for all people and communities.

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