

Evaluating and Considering a Registered Apprenticeship Program

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Does your forest products manufacturing facility need to grow a new generation of talented team members? Are you seeking a method to train future employees while ensuring they meet your company's standards? Implementing a registered apprenticeship program can assist in developing a consistent pipeline of trained workers that meet the specialized needs of your company.

An apprentice program is a structured training system that allows individuals to learn a trade while working under the supervision of an experienced team member. A registered apprenticeship program can be an effective way for businesses to attract, train, and retain employees.

Starting an apprenticeship program can provide benefits such as:

- Reducing hiring costs by developing a skilled workforce internally
- Increasing productivity through structured, on-the-job training
- Improving employee retention by offering clear career advancement paths
- Allowing businesses to access government grants, tax credits, and funding
- Enhancing safety and compliance via standardized training

How to Build a Successful Apprenticeship?

Learn-while-you-earn programs help companies build a strong workforce and attract job seekers to the forest products industry. By offering structured, on-the-job training, companies create career paths that benefit both apprentices and businesses. Apprenticeships also improve employee retention rates as graduates are likely to stay.

Key attributes of successful apprenticeship programs:

- Clear goals and objectives
- Robust curriculum
- Qualified mentors
- Recognized credential
- Competitive compensation with advancement opportunities
- Efficient recruiting and onboarding process
- Regular evaluation and adjustments

Businesses should plan carefully to include these elements for a successful apprenticeship program that benefits everyone involved.

Planning an Apprenticeship Program That Meets Your Objectives

When starting an apprenticeship program, it is important to identify the specific ways the program can benefit your business:

- Increase production
- Reduce turnover
- Enhance safety
- Address skills gaps
- Attract workers from populations you don't usually recruit from

Define what success looks like for your business and establish measurable goals to track progress. Consider surveying your current workforce to identify gaps and needs before finalizing your apprenticeship objectives.

Creating an Apprenticeship Curriculum

Your apprenticeship program may elevate candidates from zero experience to journey-level status; thus, it is crucial to have a curriculum that progressively develops their skills. As an employer, you must carefully structure your training program to ensure apprentices acquire the range of skills required by your business.

Your training program should comprise:

- Structured on-the-job training with clear skill progression benchmarks
- Classroom instruction
- Constructive feedback from experienced mentors
- Official certification exams that lead to a credential
- A combination of competency-based and time-based training to ensure mastery of skills

The curriculum should be tailored to your company's processes to guarantee that apprentices are trained in alignment with your needs. It is important to accommodate various learning styles; some individuals learn best through practical experience, while others may absorb information more effectively if presented verbally or in written form.

By tailoring your apprenticeship curriculum to meet your company's requirements, you ensure that apprentices graduate with the precise skills necessary for success within your organization. The duration of your curriculum and program will depend on the trade, the initial level of experience, and the balance between theoretical and practical training needed. Some programs might cover all aspects within a few months, whereas others may require several years for completion. Furthermore, consider collaborating with local trade schools or workforce development programs to enrich the curriculum with external educational resources and instructors.

Choosing Qualified Mentors

A workforce's strength is often determined by its leadership. Apprentices require guidance and support during their training process, which can be provided by qualified mentors. Ideal mentors should possess the following traits:

- Experience in their field
- Patience and effective communication skills
- Ability to provide constructive feedback
- Competence in working with individuals from diverse backgrounds
- Respect for various learning styles
- Knowledge of the company's processes

Current employees may fulfill these criteria, or it might be necessary to seek individuals externally. In-house mentors benefit from being acquainted with the company's culture and procedures, whereas external mentors can offer new insights.

Combining both internal and external mentorship can be effective. For instance, an apprentice could have a primary mentor responsible for daily training, supplemented by support from other employees or experts when needed. To ensure uniformity in training, developing mentoring guidelines or conducting training sessions for senior employees preparing for mentorship roles may be beneficial.

Benefits of a Registered Apprenticeship Program

To attract top talent to your apprenticeship program, consider registering it with the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) or your State Apprenticeship Agency for benefits like federal resources, tax incentives, workforce training grants, and technical assistance.

A registered apprenticeship program must meet five core requirements:

1. **Paid Job** – Apprentices are paid employees from day one, with a wage structure that increases as they gain skills and experience.
2. **On-the-Job Learning** – Apprentices must complete structured, real-world training that aligns with your company's needs.
3. **Classroom Learning** – Formal education can be provided in-house, through online training, or in partnership with a community college or vocational school.
4. **Mentorship** – Each apprentice is paired with a skilled mentor to provide hands-on training, guidance, and evaluation.
5. **Credentialing** – Upon completion, apprentices receive a nationally recognized credential that certifies their expertise in the trade.

On-the-job learning in a registered apprenticeship program often leads to a journey-level credential, benefiting both the apprentice and your company by:

- Improving safety and quality standards
- Reducing turnover
- Attracting new talent

Why You Should Register Your Apprenticeship

Registering your apprenticeship program shows potential candidates that your training is structured and standardized, leading to a valuable credential. It enhances your company's reputation and helps attract top talent. By doing so or partnering with an established program, you create a sustainable talent pipeline benefiting both your business and workforce.

Finding The Right Candidates for Your Apprenticeship

Not every job seeker is suitable for an apprenticeship. You must carefully screen candidates and select those who are the best fit.

Look for people who are:

- Motivated to learn
- Able to take direction and feedback
- Reliable and punctual
- Able to work independently and as part of a team
- Willing to commit to the program's duration

Ask about their long-term career goals, as an apprentice seeking only a short-term solution may not complete the program. Ensure candidates fit your company's culture.

Expand your candidate pool by reaching out to high schools, vocational training programs, and military transition programs. Also, consider current entry-level employees interested in upskilling through apprenticeships.

Resources

U.S. Department of Labor – Apprenticeship/USA State Offices - State offices are located across the nation to provide technical assistance and support to program sponsors, answer questions about the apprenticeship model, guide partners on each phase of developing a program, connect businesses to training providers, and advise partners on available funding sources to support apprenticeships.

<https://www.apprenticeship.gov/about-us/state-office>

U.S. Department of Labor – Apprenticeship/USA Dashboard – Providing information on existing programs and trends at a state level, including by industry.

<https://www.apprenticeship.gov/data-and-statistics/apprentices-by-state-dashboard>