



APPRENTICES WANTED

Tutelage Paying Off for Trilogy

By **Rebecca Patrick**

Apprenticeships aren't only in the "trades" and manufacturing anymore.

They are expanding to other industries as low unemployment combined with unfilled jobs – largely due to underqualified applicants – are driving the workforce in new directions.

Understanding and embracing that shift will be increasingly necessary for Hoosier employers and job seekers.

Laying the groundwork

Trilogy Health Services, which provides care through senior living communities in Indiana and three other Midwestern states, is among the first to make the apprenticeship leap on a large scale outside the traditional industries.

Todd Schmiedeler, senior vice president, foundation and workforce development, breaks down how Trilogy's apprenticeship model works.

"As an employer, I'm going to give you an opportunity to advance your education from a classroom perspective and when you increase your knowledge and show you're competent with that knowledge, I'm then going to allow you to do on-the-job training with that.

"You take that knowledge and apply it in real terms to help somebody, in particular our residents. And as a result of that, I'm going to promote you and give you a pay raise. You're going to earn a



"We sat down and created the apprenticeship program because it just made common sense to us about how to take care of our frontline people," says Todd Schmiedeler of Trilogy Health Services. From caregivers to culinary, employees have embraced it and retention at the company has vastly improved.

national certification because you're confident in both the knowledge and the skills," he describes.

In Trilogy's case, high turnover in two entry-level areas – clinical care and dietary – prompted the move to apprenticeships.

"In the first five months, we had about 800 of our employees being interested and opting into the program and start their certificate journey. Once we saw that, we really understood the value of it and decided we're going to make this open to every single employee," Schmiedeler shares.

"We now basically make (the apprenticeship) part of the role if you're a CNA (certified nursing assistant/aide) with us and if you're in any of our culinary programs from a dietary aide all the way up to our lead cooks and chefs."

He reports feedback from employees has been "outstanding" and given Trilogy insight it never had.

"We've always been very good at employee satisfaction, candidly, but we couldn't understand why that didn't result in even lower turnover. What we learned early on was that employees in those (entry-level) positions felt there wasn't a transparent career path.

"If you've read anything about

millennials, their time period for growth is really in the 90 days to six months' time frame," Schmiedeler asserts. "So, we saw an opportunity to leverage the skills that we needed, the areas of improvement that those employees desired and basically partner on some national industry certifications that we then cross-walked with Ivy Tech, for instance, so that they (employees) would get college credit for that as they go into their degree (if they so choose)."

Schmiedeler says Ivy Tech is the "No. 1 partner" for the CNA and QMA (qualified medication aide) positions and where "our employees do their clinicals at their existing home campus, while their certifications can be done online, on demand and mobile friendly."

Tangible impact

Indiana's Next Level Jobs program, which provides reimbursements for Hoosier employers for training employees in high-demand fields, has been a real catalyst for Trilogy.

"If you look at our four states, by far Indiana is leading the way on this. We did roughly 2,000 certifications in 2018 across our apprentice program and over 1,200 of them were in Indiana. Next Level Jobs was a really good accelerator for us," Schmiedeler remarks.

"We got a lot of new hires because we positioned it as going to give you a pathway to grow. It was a huge opportunity to get really energized people who wanted to grow."

In 2018, the 1,200 Indiana workers who took part in the apprenticeship program and earned certification "were granted annual raises of \$1.5 million outside of their normal pay raise. You're talking about real money coming to Hoosiers who are CNAs (and other positions), and they are (now) doing a better job taking care of the residents," he offers.

Turnover in Indiana – the largest Trilogy state with half of its overall employees – has been reduced 44% and the retention rate is at 83% for those completing a registered apprentice plan (done through the U.S. Department of Labor).

Schmiedeler pinpoints what has changed in the minds of employees.

"By getting these certificates, they not only got a pay raise, they also felt great about being able to do their job better for the people they were caring for and about. I think it's a combination of those two things that has really made a difference in our retention."

While everything is rosy now, Schmiedeler admits one early challenge.

"We didn't understand the effort it would take to educate our employees on



New State Focus on Apprenticeships and More

An executive order last spring from Gov. Eric Holcomb created the Office of Work-Based Learning & Apprenticeship within the Indiana Department of Workforce Development. The agency was operational in June.

One of the first undertakings of executive director Darrel Zeck was to tour the state. A total of 32 interactive meetings were held to learn existing best practices and promote the office and on-the-job experiences – such as apprenticeships, internships and job shadowing – that employers can put in place.

The office's three main objectives are:

- Partner with the U.S. Department of Labor to expand registered apprenticeship programs in Indiana
- Develop a framework of other work-based pathways and implement those
- Build up public-private partnerships to increase business and industry engagement with education systems

The unique piece that the office offers is creating state earn-and-learn programs for both business and K-12 schools (see main story).

Zeck is quick to stress that none of what the office does is "one-size-fits-all. Everything we work on is structured and scalable, and it ranges anywhere from six weeks to probably four years in length.

"At the end of the day, we are trying to design programs to meet the skills that employers demand. This is not some just pre-programmed piece for them; it really gets after exactly what they need," he relays.

"We are also working both sides, adult and youth. You will find in other states that programs are very focused on one or the other, it's very important for the state of Indiana, I believe, to be working on both."

RESOURCE: Darrel Zeck, Office of Work-Based Learning & Apprenticeship, at www.in.gov/dwd/apprenticeship.htm

understanding what an apprentice program is. There's no cultural backing of that in health care, so when we talk about apprenticeships there's really not an understanding of it within the sector or within the industry."

Reaching out to high schools

What has Schmiedeler really excited "for the next 12 to 24 months" is implementing and promoting Trilogy's recently granted state earn-and-learn program (SEAL).

Darrel Zeck, who is the executive director of Indiana's new Office of Work-Based Learning & Apprenticeship (see sidebar), says "people generally view these SEALs as being state-level certified apprenticeships."

"What we do is build state earn-and-learns with both business and with K-12. We offer to work with businesses or K-12 to identify what their needs are, what skills they need." Partnerships and programs are built out of those conversations to identify which career pathways make the most sense.

For Trilogy, it was determining how to take its successful existing program and apply it to youth.

Schmiedeler notes Trilogy has had partnerships with high schools for a long time. "But we've not had the structure, just like we didn't have for our employees – a career path that was clear and transparent and allowed for engagement at a higher level of both our employees

and students, so they could take a little bit more control and ownership of where they're going with their career.

"We're going into the high schools where we've had a relationship and saying, 'We'd like to complement what we've been doing and add more value and here's how.'"

Schmiedeler also reports that the state is giving Trilogy referrals and others are taking note of the SEAL. He mentions two high schools in Bloomington and Plainfield, which didn't have a program previously, "are really interested in developing a nurse prep program and we can help partner with them because we have those abilities, while giving students real-world life experiences and the students are making money."

Zeck praises Trilogy's approach.

"Having multiple pathways and maintaining or building a good culture along with that will help with retention. Trilogy has done exactly that."

Based on how everything has turned out, Schmiedeler "absolutely would have loved to had this idea three years ago and be three years further down the road. We see how happy our employees are. We now have a culture of inclusivity."

"Everybody has the power to grow at their own pace and in their own time. ... There are a lot of just life barriers for them that don't enable them to go to what has traditionally been brick-and-mortar training. We created a model that allows them to grow and grow in a way that really suits their life and their lifestyle. ... We're very pleased with the results."

RESOURCES: Todd Schmiedeler, Trilogy Health Services, at www.trilogyhs.com