



## **Retail Community Partner Townhall Round Table – 12/7/16**

**Workforce Snohomish, in collaboration with Snohomish County and Economic Alliance Snohomish County**, has been convening monthly industry-focused employer roundtables to gauge and assess our region's workforce challenges. These roundtable events have identified issues that are industry-specific, as well as those seen across all types and sizes of employers. Each quarter, Workforce Snohomish shares the results with all interested community partners to help align and focus community resources.

**Retail Employers** met on 9/27/16 and identified multiple issues that they are facing within their workforce. The workforce community partners will continue to realign the community resources to address the deeper and more systemic issues facing the pipeline, retention, and development of the retail workforce. While solutions are being developed and implemented, the community of partners would like to make sure that current solutions for many of the issues raised currently exist and can help the engaged businesses.

### **Following are the takeaways from the Retail Community Partner Townhall Conversation on 12/7/16.**

How to Read: underlined are the Different Sections, the red text are the **Gaps / Needs Improvements**, the green text are the **Possible Solutions / Recommendations** and the black text are the general comments that apply to the section.

1. **Lack of soft skills in job applicants and current workers**
  - a. Current solutions
    - i. Could be addressed by connecting veterans that generally hold soft skills to positions.
      1. Let businesses know how to connect vets.
      2. Provide outreach to veterans about the positions.
      3. Vet center and WorkSource locations.
    - ii. Promoting Key Train and NCRC certification to job seekers, which standardizes soft skill training and that is already available in WorkSource Centers and other locations
  - b. Short-term solutions
    - i. WorkSource and partners develop more paid internship positions in the community.
    - ii. WorkSource and partners develop and hold customer service classes beyond entry-level knowledge and skills .
  - c. Long-term solutions



- i. WorkSource could offer non-traditional times for those with life barriers so they have access to the training.
- ii. Workforce system could advocate the need for K-12 to instill concept of accountability at earlier age in education system.
- iii. Community colleges and high schools could integrate soft skills training into current course content, instead of as separate classes or workshops.

## 2. The general perception of retail as a career

### a. Short-term solution

- i. Being clear and open about the changing schedules and physically demanding aspects of the job to perspective employers.
- ii. Outreach about the family wage jobs within retail.
  - 1. Educate WorkSource and partner staff on the opportunities within retail so that they can recruit with confidence.
  - 2. WorkSource staff take time to work and talk with their business clients to learn personal stories about why they are in retail.
  - 3. Outreach targeting parents that may not know the opportunities that they are pushing their children away from within the industry.

## 3. Recruitment issues

### a. Short-term solutions

- i. WorkSource can outreach to high schools and people with high barriers and push the resume builder aspect so they are better able to present themselves to employers.
- ii. Build greater recruitment and outreach on college campuses beyond just entry-level and share possible career pathways to college students.
- iii. Provide outreach to middle- and high-school students about the careers within retail.
- iv. WorkSource can assist and train job seekers on how to complete an online application that is common within retail.

### b. Long-term solutions

- i. WorkSource can compile a database of best practices for hiring within the industry.
- ii. WorkSource can provide data and outreach material about the career progression for the different routes within retail (e.g. career pathways, pipelines, development).

## 4. Retention issues

### a. Short-term solutions

- i. Provide data to employers about non-wage benefits that help retain employees (e.g. guaranteed minimum hours, consistent schedule versus flexible schedule, career progression planning, brand recognition, etc.)



- ii. Provide businesses with resources, e.g. workshops, webinars, to help them determine where they should advertise positions that are relevant to their prospective employees, e.g. Twitter, SnapChat, other social media for teens.
      - iii. Provide businesses with resources, e.g. workshops and webinars, to help them develop mentoring and coaching skills that will help keep employees with the company.
    - b. Long-term solutions
      - i. Work with employers to see if there is a way to “share” employees between business types that are cyclical, e.g. mall holiday seasonal employment to home improvement spring employment.
      - ii. Provide businesses with resources, e.g. workshops and webinars that will help them identify what their company culture is and help them market that to their employees so the employee wants to stay there.
- 5. **Lack of confidence in job applicants**
  - a. Current solutions
    - i. WorkSource locations provide assistance for those looking for work.
      - 1. How to job search.
      - 2. Where to job search.
      - 3. Review resume and cover letter.
      - 4. Practice interviews skills.
  - b. Short-term solutions
    - i. Educate job seekers on the importance of resume appearance. Employers do judge on resume appearance and a little more time and detail spent on them can lead to less time being unemployed.
- 6. **Job seekers fail to understand proper interview attire and etiquette**
  - a. Current Solutions
    - i. WorkSource locations.
      - 1. Interview classes and one-on-one training.
    - ii. Rotating but recurring course provided within multiple locations around the county by multiple Workforce system partners.
- 7. **Lack of qualified candidates for open positions**
  - a. Current Solutions
    - i. Adding WorksourceWA to outreach platforms.
  - b. Short-term solutions
    - i. Locate more funding for industry recognized certificate programs that are offered locally.
    - ii. Secure more funding to offer work experiences.
    - iii. Provide businesses with resources (workshops, webinars) on inter-generational workplace environments, best practices, etc.
    - iv. Business Solutions and others working directly with employers should candidly discuss that what may appear to be “job hopping” on a resume may actually be millennials starting work during the recession that may have needed to do



contract work or hold other short term project-based positions. It may not be a reflection of “lack of loyalty”, but a necessity of the times.

- c. Long-term solutions
  - i. Provide more than one training cohort a year of in-demand skills.
  - ii. Workforce system collects best of practices to teach and offer resources for businesses to develop mentorship programs.
- 8. Applicants do not have a real idea or vision of wage or job roles
  - a. Short-term solutions
    - i. Interject time within programs and courses to explore career progression including entry level wages. This will ensure that people do not think average wage is entry level wage.
    - ii. Provide responsibility and task progression, e.g. entry level will likely hold brooms and slowly move in to task roles. Job applicants will not start as a supervisor without prior experience.
    - iii. Provide realistic time frames from entry level to career level responsibility and roles.
    - iv. Educate and outreach knowledge about total compensation; not just wages.
      - 1. Focus on quality of life aspects:
        - a. Work Culture.
        - b. Leave and sick time.
        - c. Location.
        - d. Health.
        - e. Benefits.
- 9. Businesses do not know if they are compensating employees at competitive rates
  - a. Current solutions
    - i. WorksourceWA or the local Business Solutions team at WorkSource Everett should be able to provide wage data to businesses on the local economy within the occupations.
- 10. Businesses do not know about WorkSource or WorkSourceWA
  - a. Short-term solutions
    - i. Marketing and outreach are needed to inform employers of the resources available at WorkSource Centers.
    - ii. Specific outreach plans need to be developed targeting human resource managers in small to mid-sized companies.
    - iii. Concentrate on building relationships and partnerships with industry leaders.
  - b. Long-term solutions
    - i. WorkSource website could be set up like 211 service. All of the workforce system needs in one location and with accessible databases.
    - ii. WorkSource could become a better coordinator and central point for engagement, tours, outreach, and community resource information. This will become more useful for businesses and a connecting point for community partners.
- 11. It is hard to retain good employees



a. Short Term Solutions:

- i. WorkSource could provide businesses with resources (workshops, webinars, etc.) emphasizing that training is a career pathway and how to inform employees of the opportunities within the company towards better pay, increased responsibility, etc. This can help keep employees engaged.
- ii. Help businesses understand the benefit to setting up the expectation that at each new level, more training is provided and incentivized for those training steps.
- iii. Provide businesses with resources (workshops, webinars, etc.) that help them identify what their company culture is and help them market that to their employees (small & nimble, large with corporate type health benefits, family atmosphere, etc.)