



Building Powerful Relationships

Bill Hewlett and Dave Packard. Ben Cohen and Jerry Greenfield. John Lennon and Paul McCartney. All great partnerships that evolved into highly successful enterprises. *How did they form these productive relationships and how do organizations like community colleges find great partnering counterparts?*

The common thread seems to be that most well rounded partners recognize their limitations and respect what the other can bring to the partnership to help them achieve a goal. At Ivy Tech Community College in Gary, Indiana, President Marlon Mitchell feels determining mutual needs is key. “You have to ask a potential partner how you can meet their needs,” he said. “We are no longer training students in a vacuum. We’re training for a specific need as identified by working with local businesses and industry and determining what skills are needed.”

Landon Taylor, CEO of Base 11, a nonprofit STEM workforce and entrepreneur accelerator and new NACCE partner, says that industry has recognized the need to work proactively with organizations like his – and community colleges. “Industry recognizes the current job gap as a crisis,” said Taylor. “They realize they can’t sit back and wait for talented, skilled and prepared workers to come to them. The shortage of available employees with STEM talent represents a big business risk. In our discussions with many of the top STEM-based employers, we’ve learned that as many as 50 percent of their senior engineers are eligible

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MARLON MITCHELL, IVY TECH COMMUNITY COLLEGE

for retirement in the next 10 years. If companies don't find replacements, they'll lose their ability to compete domestically and globally."

Opportunity Motivates

If remaining competitive is a strong motivator for both businesses and community colleges, opportunity is another. According to Mitchell, the timing for collaborating with new partners has never been better. "There's no time to spare," he said. "We're having better conversations with community partners and those conversations have a significantly different tenor than just three years ago. Among the four key partners we work with who represent area industry, we've had strategic conversations with each of them to prepare for the future. Companies are providing training dollars in northern Indiana in the areas of energy, light manufacturing and transportation. All of these represent opportunities for jobs, career enhancement and entrepreneurship for local residents."

A major movement now underway within the STEM community is to work with industries to close the skills gap. "Employers are pointing out that even graduates with STEM degrees aren't coming to the workforce with the demonstrable skills to succeed from day one," said Taylor. "So companies are now asking how they can work with students in STEM-related majors to give them the hands-on experiences and training that will prepare them for the realities of the 21st century workforce. A real effort is being made by industry to provide support for community colleges in creating these pathways. The timing is great for academia to think outside the box."

Jobs, Jobs, Jobs

Currently there are nearly six million unfilled jobs in the United States, the majority of which do not require bachelor's degrees. In northern Indiana, on average, an individual with an associate's degree will make more money in his/her first year of employment than a four-year college graduate in that state, according to Mitchell. "We're becoming the first choice for education from people in the community by building relationships and meeting the needs of our corporate partners," he added.

"Community colleges are top organizations to help fill these jobs," observed Taylor. "Employers are saying that many of our middle-skills jobs do not require a four-year degree, but in many cases, can be accomplished with a two-year degree and a certificate in key competencies. It's also a great opportunity for Base 11 because

our work involves connecting students, colleges and corporations. For example, we have an eight-month workforce-training program in collaboration with a community college that prepares students for jobs in information technology at specific partner employers.

Corporations also want students to be trained in entrepreneurial innovation; they are looking for talent that has entrepreneurial innovation in their DNA. We're very tapped into this dynamic as an organization and seek out partners like NACCE that are too."

O'Merrial Butchee, director of the Innovation and Entrepreneurship Center at Ivy Tech, expands the thought. "If you can get a person educated and that individual finds a job, they quickly become aware of the value of education," she said. "This is highly motivating. Entrepreneurs are by nature tinkers, and these employees often become very intrapreneurial, bringing about positive changes in the companies they work for. Some will even eventually leave their job and pursue their own entrepreneurial ventures."

Picking Your Partners

The National Institute for Staff and Organizational Development (NISOD) at the University of Texas in Austin works with a variety of partners, providing meeting space and accommodations and hosting representatives at its annual conference. "We also partner with Cengage Learning to provide training and resources to adjunct community college faculty around the country, producing blogs about best practices and webinars that can be added to our own webinar offerings," said Edward Leach, executive director of NISOD. "Through our partnership with Cengage Learning, we also help sponsor several adjunct faculty to attend our annual conference, which has been a benefit for several community colleges."

The key to successful partnering, according to Leach, is finding organizations with similar interests and clearly defining what each partner is looking for out of the relationship. "We partner with certain organizations because it provides us with the opportunity to provide programs and services for our members we otherwise wouldn't be able to provide," he said. "This gives us a competitive advantage, and community colleges, in leveraging partnerships wisely, can achieve this same advantage."

Colleges that in the past have waited for students to come to them will be quickly bypassed, according to Taylor. "Today, forward-thinking colleges know they have to

be proactive and strategic. They realize they need to be poised as the 'destination of choice' by demonstrating they have the resources to get students jobs and provide career pathways. Colleges that are propelled by an entrepreneurial mindset are now shifting to a performance-based approach. Increasingly, new partners - and not just federal and state agencies - but national and local companies, nonprofit organizations and others are tying financial support to performance metrics in their grants."

Edward Leach suggests identifying powerful partnerships that are mutually beneficial and finding organizations with similar values to your own. "Most importantly, make sure potential partnering organizations are a good fit with your organization," he said. "It makes the partnership easier and likely more effective when working with entities that are closely aligned with your organization's purpose. Also, know what you expect out of the partnership and be clear about what you and potential partners are willing and able to provide. It also helps to maintain good communications on an ongoing basis so there's no misaligned expectations."

Butchee suggests having an open mind when exploring new partnerships. "You don't need any criteria for exploring new partnerships," she said. "Sometimes you find the hidden jewels in the worst-looking facility. Once you've had the initial contact and decide you've got something to mutually build upon, then by all means do your financial diligence but listen to your potential partner. Anyone can be innovative. We pass over no one. Entrepreneurial thinking is everything." ●

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