

WHO WILL SUCCEED IN TOMORROW'S JOB MARKET?

BRIDGING THE SOFT SKILLS GAP FOR A MORE EQUITABLE TALENT PIPELINE

The world is changing rapidly – and the future of education and the workforce is changing with it. As automation, artificial intelligence, and other new technologies disrupt industries at a breakneck pace, the world of work is evolving to meet the changing demands of an uncertain future. To survive and thrive in a rapidly-changing job market, workers will need transferable soft skills – skills that will enable them to succeed regardless of industry or sector and to effectively move from job to job. Meanwhile, the field of K-12 education is experiencing a similarly large shift, as schools rethink what a diploma means as they respond to a mandate to prepare students with both the academic and soft skills needed to succeed in college and future careers.

THE SOFT SKILLS GAP

As employers and schools prepare for the future, they face some big challenges in training students and workers in the skills needed for future success. Both are currently facing a soft skills gap exacerbated by the following:

1. Businesses are under-investing in soft skills development,
2. Schools face resource and capacity challenges in developing soft skills, and
3. Access and exposure to soft skills training and development is not equitably distributed across all income and demographic groups.

This growing skills gap is leaving employers unable to fill millions of open jobs, and leaving too many young people reliant upon the networks and experiences of childhood and adolescence to build these needed skills.

SHARED BENEFITS EQUAL A SHARED SOLUTION

Employers and schools can confront this growing need for strong soft skills through partnership. The education and business communities are united in their recognition of the importance of soft skills to students' future success in both college and careers. By taking shared responsibility for student success, schools and businesses can share in the benefits of a better-trained, more self-sufficient generation of workers.

Working together – with experienced intermediaries such as Urban Alliance – each of these partners have a critical role to play in ensuring that all young people leave high school having mastered critical soft skills and are truly prepared to succeed in career and life.

INTERNSHIPS BRIDGE THE SOFT SKILLS GAP

The education sector has established that soft skills can be explicitly taught and developed through intentional learning environments rooted in relationships, settings, and contexts. However, the shift to the social and emotional learning (SEL) framework that develops these skills has been slow, and neither businesses nor schools are set up to tackle this gap alone.

Fortunately, the two can partner right now on a ready-made, efficient solution to soft skills development: well-designed internships. Using the principles of SEL, internships build soft skills through:

1. Built-in training,
2. The opportunity for practice, repetition, and feedback on the job,
3. Safe learning environments that foster inclusiveness and acceptance, and
4. Access to caring adult mentors who are responsible for learning and development.

Turning to intermediaries that are already set up to manage all the moving parts of successful work-based learning – such as Urban Alliance and other nonprofits – can be the key to helping schools and businesses take the hard work out of investing in soft skills development.