



OPINION COLUMNISTS

Victor Dollar: Developing a strong workforce in Ventura County

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More than 20,000 businesses, most of them small, call Ventura County home. No matter the size or industry, the fortunes of a business can turn quickly under circumstances beyond its control (think Great Recession). Playing a role in regional workforce development can help a business stabilize and grow despite the ups and downs of the economy.

One way to get involved in workforce development is through the Workforce Development Board (WDB) of Ventura County (formerly known as the Workforce Investment Board). Focusing on growing industries such as manufacturing, hospitality, health care, infrastructure, biotechnology and energy, the WDB committees work with private-sector and public-sector leaders to find regional workforce solutions in ways that individual employers cannot. Here are some examples.

Hospital members of the WDB Healthcare Committee usually are competitors. However, they all share a challenge with retiring baby boomers ? especially a looming shortage of clinical lab scientists to analyze blood and tissue samples for patients. United in the need for a strong local talent pool, the hospitals in Ventura County are

collaborating on lab certifications to provide local experience for postgraduate students from California State University, Channel Islands.

Water and wastewater are making headlines, especially with the current drought. Although there are openings for water-related jobs in Ventura County, employers cannot find enough qualified workers. Members of the WDB Clean/Green Committee are participating in a regional survey to learn more about job requirements for water and wastewater occupations to help identify local training gaps and raise career awareness.

Manufacturing offers the highest average pay in Ventura County, but businesses still struggle to find enough qualified workers to fill open positions ? even at the entry level. Business leaders on the WDB Manufacturing Committee have developed a list of manufacturing readiness skills, providing a valuable reference for career pathways and curriculum development at the high school, adult education and community college levels.

In each of these examples, it took businesses working with other businesses to find solutions to Ventura County workforce issues that would not have been possible otherwise.

There are other ways that businesses can help our local workforce prepare for the jobs of today and tomorrow.

If you are in a management role, suggest that your company create intern opportunities to introduce students to your industry. Young people will get a chance to learn about your business and its job-skills requirements and you will get a firsthand look at potential candidates for future job openings.

Consider inviting a teacher to job shadow one of your key

employees. Many teachers have spent years in the classroom but have limited experience outside of education. Think about the powerful career messages a teacher could convey to students as a result of spending time in your business setting.

Volunteer to work with workforce-related organizations where you feel your involvement could help both your business and employees. And be sure to sign up for career days at local high schools, community colleges and universities. Those are great opportunities to spark interest in young people about careers in your industry.

Go to the Workforce Development Board website (workforceventuracounty.org) to find intern program guidelines and links to schools in Ventura County. Also, take a look at the low-cost or no-cost programs for employers, such as free business consulting, on-the-job training and recruitment services.

Interested in participating on a WDB committee? All of our meetings are open to the public, and you are welcome to be our guest. For committee meeting dates and times, go to the calendar listing on the WDB website (workforceventuracounty.org).

Get involved with workforce development in Ventura County. It's good for business and for the economy.

Victor Dollar, of Newbury Park, is chair of the Workforce Development Board of Ventura County and vice president of sales for Brighton Management.

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