Promoting Internal Mobility for the Mainstream Workforce

5 Proven Strategies for HR Leaders

P A T H S T R E A M

Introduction

The "Great Resignation" of the 2020s has made urgent what HR professionals have known for years—employee retention at all levels is essential to successful business operations.

A recent Gallup poll estimated that the cost of replacing an individual employee can range from one-half to two times the employee's annual salary. For a company of 100 people, employee turnover could cost anywhere from $700,000 to $3 million per year.

And yet, 70% of US employees would stay with their current employer if there were career development opportunities available to them. Why? Because when organizations help future-proof employees' careers by teaching them skills that won't become obsolete, employees see a direct path to career advancement in front of them. This improves retention and boosts morale.

What is the Mainstream Workforce?

The mainstream workforce is made up of professionals typically earning under $60k and range from frontline teams to mid-level office staff. Despite being essential to day-to-day business operations and making up 80% of the workforce, this group is also frequently overlooked when it comes to opportunities for career development and advancement.

This set of workers is worth investing in. According to the Branch report, "hourly workers are twice as interested in earning a promotion at their current employer via their work experience than in changing jobs to climb the ladder." This preference among workers to stay at a company and advance internally indicates that employers wishing to retain their workforce need to leverage this interest by providing their mainstream workforce learning and development opportunities in the workplace.

Why do they get left behind?

Why do these mainstream workers struggle with finding advancement opportunities when they have such great potential to add value to their companies beyond working the front line? The answer is that many educational programs are not built for individuals working an hourly position.

IT and coding bootcamps are often intimidating and courses are only able to be completed within restrictive time blocks. This does not account for learners whose time spent working exists outside of the nine to five workday.

Additionally, most mainstream professional education resources that do account for individuals requiring an asynchronous teaching model rely on passive, video-based content. This puts learners at risk for disengagement, and ultimately doesn't move the needle on learning, retention, or career mobility.

1 Treat employees as "whole people" not "skills gap" to be filled.

Students in mainstream roles might have had mixed experiences with school or degree programs in the past. As a result, it's important to choose programs for mainstream workers that have "learner-centered" or constructivist pedagogical models, treating students as whole people whose complex motivations, backgrounds, and strengths should be acknowledged as part of the learning process – instead of just treating them as empty vessels to be filled with knowledge and skills. By selecting programs with curricula that acknowledge employee motivation and engagement, HR leaders can help workers not only develop skill proficiency but also promote satisfaction and retention.

At Pathstream we do this by:

- Including messages in our courses that directly counter imposter syndrome and encourage learners to persist

- Feature case studies of people from similar backgrounds so they can see others
- Offer student support coaching throughout the learning experience so that students have real people to reach out to when they get stuck
- Provide helpdesk support 24/7 so that learners can access guidance when they need it – even if that is after hours

This is why our completion rates are 75%, which is 33 percentage points higher than the industry average, even though we are serving learners with less traditional education histories than most training programs.

2 Build programs that offer both flexibility and structure.

Offer flexibility – do not require specific times to log in. When working with adult learners, they often need to complete coursework on nights, weekends, in between work shifts and parenting responsibilities. Yet encourage a sense of accountability by offering deadlines and a cohort of other learners working through the material at the same time

These learners still benefit from having a real person they can reach out to if they get stuck. They also appreciate deadlines that help them continue moving forward in a course, even if they can do the work during hours that fit best with their schedule. Having employees work through an asynchronous training with a cohort of other employees can also motivate them to complete.

At Pathstream we do this by:

- Not requiring specific log in times, but we do have students start with a cohort so that they have a sense of accountability and camaraderie as they complete a learning experience

- Allowing students to schedule office hour appointments at times that work for them
- Enabling students to get individualized feedback from a real instructor on every single assignment.

3 Encourage hands-on learning vs. passive video consumption.

There's a reason why most of us remember the labs we did in science class as opposed to the lecture we slept through. Hands-on learning is "stickier" from a retention perspective. Find training programs that don't just rely on video-based instruction and multiple-choice questions, but actually have people learn by doing.

At Pathstream we do this by teaching software in a labs-based environment. All Pathstream courses are project-based as opposed to assessed by tests so learners' success is correlated directly with practical knowledge gained.

4

Contextualize new skills and show how they can immediately be applied on the job.

Career paths that require digital skills are often very abstract to people who have primarily worked in frontline, customer service, or administrative roles. To help bring these new roles to life for learners consider training programs that enable opportunities to speak directly with people already in these roles. Show – don't tell – them about the types of projects and tasks they would be expected to complete in these new roles.

At Pathstream, we do this by:
- Including day in the life videos and narratives as part of every course
- Aligning all assignments to real projects they would be expected to complete in an entry-level job using real data sets, company case studies, and actual software.

> *Pathstream - allowed me to showcase the potential I have within myself and the benefits those skills can bring to my company. When the relationship between employer and employee is strong, so is the employee's happiness and job satisfaction.*
> *- Robert Guise*

5 Align training to industry certifications.

Employees can be motivated if the training programs they complete align to credentials and certifications accepted more broadly across an industry.

At Pathstream we do this by aligning our training programs to the Salesforce Exam, CAPM Exam, Tableau Desktop Exam, Facebook Blueprint Exam

Conclusion

The battle for talent is heating up and mainstream workforce employees have more options than ever before. Upskilling employees at all levels is an investment that increases retention and morale. It also gives you access to a pool of quality employees who care about your company to fill open roles.

Companies that have upskilled with Pathstream

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