

Preparing Tomorrow's Workforce

BY MICHAEL J. QUARANTA

WHERE DOES THE TIME GO? I remember as a kid feeling like summers were endless and when it came time to return to school, I looked forward to seeing friends and classmates I'd not seen in "forever!" Today, the weeks and months fly off the calendar and it's difficult to imagine how things seemed to progress so slowly a few decades ago. Life was certainly much simpler back then.

Businesses of every size and industry are constantly changing too. It is increasingly difficult for them to predict changes in technology, customer needs, and the staffing backgrounds they'll need to remain relevant, profitable, and growing. In order to have a ready workforce in these hyper-paced, dynamic times, we must shift the focus of the Partnership more directly on high school education, certificate programs, technical and trade schools, college, and university programs.

Early childhood development, preschool, elementary, and middle school experiences are still extremely important. Those early years are critical to the development and success of students in those later years. Many employers are engaged with organizations, providers, and schools that focus on those important, early years. We applaud that. We will stay connected to many of those schools through our Principal for a Day program. However, our focus is

going to narrow and become more pinpointed on the late stages of education and training to better prepare the future workforce.

The Partnership will also need to ramp up efforts to help employers train and retrain workers as they journey through their careers. Constant change means learning new things and tackling the technology of tomorrow. We are living in a time when what you do at age 30, will be different by the time you reach your 40th birthday, and find yourself doing something related but vastly different by age 50.

We must instill this mindset into our young students today and prepare them to be flexible, technologically conversant, and adaptive to change. Some will find these challenges exciting and really dig into the "not doing the same old thing" over and over for decades. Others will prefer the predictability and stability of a single, well-defined path. Those careers will be there for many, but the future will see a smaller number of those opportunities.

The future is bright and full of opportunity. In the words of a former, and very successful Big Ten basketball coach, "Everyone has the will to win. But what separates us from everyone else is our will to prepare to win." The workforce is changing, and now is the time for the Delaware State Chamber's education affiliate, The Partnership to change right along with it. ■

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