Investor Dramatically Improves the Workforce

Starbucks has proved to be a leader in the youth employment space through its LeadersUp program. Six million youth ages 16 to 24, also known as opportunity youth, are neither employed nor in school, and 5 million job vacancies exist throughout the United States. Starbucks and LeadersUp recognize this crisis and are working to bridge the growing skills gap in America by connecting the next generation of workers with employment opportunities. LeadersUp aims to provide businesses with highly trained employees by connecting companies with local workforce partners. Its first partnership was with the company SK Food Group and the Central Ohio Workforce Investment Corporation (COWIC).

Steve Sposari, CEO of SK Food Group and a LeadersUp board member, took advantage of this opportunity for his business to be the first company to use LeadersUp’s services. A leader in the manufacturing and wholesale food industry, SK Food Group has a wide customer base and a growing need for more skilled workers. LeadersUp selected COWIC as the local workforce partner to support the recruitment, training, and retention needs of SK Food Group. COWIC provides a pipeline of trained and job-ready young people, prescreens candidates, generates customized training to increase retention, assists in hiring, and supports the job placement and onboarding processes. In turn, SK Food Group supplies internal resources and staff to help implement the program. With COWIC’s assistance, SK Food Group has retained 80% of its new hires after six months—an impressive feat compared with the national average of 50%.1

Measurements are critical for growing and developing a youth employment program. Working closely with LeadersUp and COWIC, SK Food Group gathers data to track progress for program improvement. Through this partnership, the employees hired through LeadersUp have remained on the job 30% longer than other workers.2 In addition, Sposari has hired 100 opportunity youth since April 2014 when this alliance began, calling it a “really good business decision.”3 LeadersUp has been a tremendous asset to SK Food Group.

This partnership has enabled SK Food Group to exceed its original expectations of allocating 10% to 15% of the 200 jobs it planned to make available to opportunity youth.4 Participation in this program has helped SK Food Group grow its number of employees from 300 to nearly 430 over the span of a year and has inspired the company to expand to 600 employees by the end of 2015.5

2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.

For more information on the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation’s work on youth employment, visit uschamberfoundation.org/CEW.