

It's about access and education

By: Veronica Cool June 24, 2016



Last week, I heard about a foreign-born orthopedic surgeon who was working as a cashier because that was the only job he could find.

Now, I know you are reading the last sentence and scratching your head. ... "Really? Why not simply reach out to Brad Chambers at Union Memorial? Or a local private practice and speak to the practice administrator?"

Right. What if the doc doesn't know Brad? Or Union Memorial's ortho program? He doesn't have access to these resources and is still fully accountable for feeding his family and handling his financial responsibilities. There's typically little time to wait for the "right" job, so he accepts the cashier position. Being a cashier is an honest way to earn a living, but is this the *highest and best use* of his time, education and expertise?

During the same meeting, we discussed various workforce development pilot programs to reduce the gap between employers and jobseekers, particularly for these underserved segments of the population:

Our youth – I'm talking about 16- to 25-year olds who are aging out of the system and lack the access to living-wage jobs and the soft skills to retain any honest, long-term job. FYI — the annual cost to educate a student is approximately \$13,000, while the cost of supporting an inmate is estimated at \$32,000.

Connect the dots: Since the typical urban 17-year-old cannot find a decent job, he/she is drawn to the streets and ends up in jail. As a society, we just acquired a \$32,000 tab.

Latinos — As a Dominican immigrant, this is one of my favorite topics. You may have heard that one out of every five millennials is a Latino and that one out of every four kindergarteners is also Latino. Yet this population does not have access to resources like the Maryland One Stop Career Centers or English-dominant job boards — not because anyone is intentionally excluding them but because the two worlds are not connected. Cultural and language barriers also impede these job seekers from garnering posts that lead to long-term careers.

Second chance or returning citizens — Please don't stop reading. I know that if you committed a crime, you gotta pay the price. I agree. But how long do you pay that price? And what if the price doesn't match the crime?

That's another column. ...

There are hundreds of citizens returning from prison who can contribute to society. But they have no access and, on occasion, lack the soft and social skills to integrate into day-to-day traditional society.

The 50+ or aging population— 33 percent to 50 percent of state workers are eligible to retire in the next three years in the state of Maryland, and 75 percent of the agencies do not have succession plans in place.

Repeat: Fifty percent of the workers can retire in the next three years and there is not a succession plan. Can someone please spell "disaster?" Here's a worker, highly educated and experienced, with little to no engagement, no access to next steps of his/her career, no motivation to mentor the incoming workers (who could be the above-mentioned youth, Latinos and returning citizens.)

So, why is there a gap?

Here lies the conundrum (love that word!) Unemployment is hovering at 5 percent, and skilled, willing talent is hard to come by — or so say employers. Our firm provides active recruiting and placement services, and I can assure that there's a bigger number of candidates seeking employment opportunities, which are hard to come by.

If both supply and demand are high, why is there a gap?

Because of access and education.

The populations seeking opportunities do not have access to said opportunities (or resources) or the education to qualify, either. The employers do not have the access to these populations, or lack the resources (staff or funding) to provide the added education and training to the candidates.

I had the privilege of being the master of ceremonies at two events recently, the Susana de Moya Foundation Scholarship Luncheon and the Big Brothers Big Sisters of the Greater Chesapeake mentoring event. Both organizations serve as bridges, connecting underserved populations to resources. In the case of SDMF, Latinos to education. For BBBS, youth to mentors. The common denominator is building the bridges and the connections to access and education. These organizations are gaining traction!

But we need more.

Policymakers need to intervene to remove some of the institutional barriers, and, to highlight, just one problem: a 4-4 Supreme Court vote to remove 4.5 million people from American society is NOT a solution; it's an impediment to advancing our economy. Our

leaders and administrators, and in turn, WE THE PEOPLE, need to become involved to provide solutions to increase access and education for our communities. These are our workers, our clients, our taxpayers. When they benefit, we all benefit. Amigos, my goal is to build bridges, so continue to share resources and opportunities with me. Till next time.

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