



Building a  
Future  
That Works

A photograph of a man and a woman in a bakery. The man, on the left, is wearing a blue denim shirt and a grey apron, smiling as he looks at the woman. The woman, on the right, is wearing a floral patterned shirt and glasses, looking back at him. In the background, there is a wooden display case filled with breads and a chalkboard with the word "Open" written on it.

# THE BUSINESS CASE FOR WORK-BASED LEARNING

## What Is Work-Based Learning?

Work-based learning refers to meaningful training that takes place at work, usually under the direction of employer coaches and managers, and has been shown to produce high value for both companies and workers.

In contrast to more hands-off approaches to employee development that involve employees learning on their own, formal work-based learning (WBL) programs include a level of intentionality, focus, and support to ensure that employees can effectively develop the skills they need to take on critical or hard-to-fill roles within the company. The most successful WBL programs include learning plans, competency assessments, coaching, mentoring, formal reviews, and methods of recognizing success.

## Why Should Companies Invest in Work-Based Learning?

Effectively administered, WBL programs such as internships and apprenticeships can help employees become proficient in their roles quickly and efficiently. Moreover, WBL programs help employers by delivering concrete business benefits.

### Improved Productivity

Employers that are able to bring new hires up to speed quickly have more productive workforces. For large employers that have significant numbers of employees who are new to their roles, improvements in “speed to proficiency” **can boost output by as much as 10 to 15 percent**. In a study conducted by the Learning and Skills Council, 81 percent of employers that used apprenticeships (one version of WBL) reported increased work output.<sup>1</sup>

### Fewer Defects

Well-trained employees make fewer mistakes; their employers get fewer customer complaints and don't have to repeat tasks or engage in expensive compliance remediation efforts. For example, the manufacturer Hypertherm “observed substantial decreases in scrap rates and re-work, **helping the company save money in raw product**” after launching a work-based learning program in 2007, according to the Association for Career and Technical Education.<sup>2</sup>



## Increased Innovation

Managers who spend less time correcting the errors of poorly trained employees can spend more time focusing on high-value activities such as customer engagement, product development, and service excellence. And one recent study found that undergraduate students who participated in WBL programs involving both academic studies and workplace training “**acquired mindset of innovative thinking and behavior.**”<sup>3</sup>

## Improvements in Employee Engagement

The most effective WBL programs help participants feel supported and successful early in their tenures, fostering a sense of belonging and commitment. According to a 2014 Gallup study, participants in WBL programs have almost **twice the level of employee engagement** as workers who haven’t taken part in them.<sup>4</sup> When employees have a sense of belonging, retention rates improve, absenteeism declines, and discretionary effort increases.

## Increased Workplace Diversity and Inclusion

**We know diverse companies lead to stronger businesses.**<sup>5</sup> Work-based learning can help cultivate more diversity in your workforce by providing the structure, support, and training needed for people of many different backgrounds and skill sets to succeed.

## How Can JFF Help?

JFF will help you assess your organization’s business drivers, evaluate your talent needs, and then support you in the design, pilot, and launch of a WBL program that combines engaging learning experiences with meaningful, role-based work. JFF will further help you promote your program to attract a diverse pool of capable, enthusiastic, and hardworking employees.

JFF’s cadre of experienced practitioners will help ensure that your program combines industry best practices with pragmatic and cost-efficient high-impact solutions. Satisfied clients include Lockheed Martin, John Deere, Nissan, Honda, and Best Buy.

1. Louisa Peacock, “Apprenticeships Improve Productivity, Say 80% of Employers,” *Personnel Today*, February 24, 2009, <https://www.personneltoday.com/hr/apprenticeships-improve-productivity-say-80-of-employers/>.
2. Association for Career and Technical Education, *Taking Business to School: Hypertherm* (Alexandria, VA: ACTE, accessed December 9, 2019), [https://www.acteonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Taking%20Business%20to%20School\\_Hypertherm.pdf](https://www.acteonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Taking%20Business%20to%20School_Hypertherm.pdf).
3. Marilia Angove, “Work-Based Learning and Innovation: A Study of International Commerce Degree Students,” *Innovation and Social Capital in Organizational Ecosystems* (Hershey, PA: IGI Global, 2019), 173-193, <https://www.igi-global.com/chapter/work-based-learning-and-innovation/223654>.
4. Catherine Imperatore, “Work-Based Learning Leads to Engaged Employees,” *CTE Policy Watch*, ACTE, October 3, 2014, <https://ctepolicywatch.acteonline.org/2014/10/work-based-learning-leads-to-engaged-employees-html>.
5. Karsten Strauss, “More Evidence that Company Diversity Leads to Better Profits,” *Forbes*, Jan. 25, 2018, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/karstenstrauss/2018/01/25/more-evidence-that-company-diversity-leads-to-better-profits/>.

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