

Transcript

00:00:04 Narrator

Welcome to the Supply Chain Automation Workforce Hub, or the Hub, interview series. The Hub is an industry intermediary funded by the U.S. Department of Labor as a one stop solution for recruiting and training skilled workers in supply chain automation powered by employers, education institutions and workforce organizations.

00:00:24 Narrator

It brings together key stakeholders to develop registered apprenticeship programs or wraps for customized training solutions. In this interview, Alex Earls, the Reentry Program Administrator in the Division of Offender Rehabilitation for the Missouri Department of Corrections, talks about how and why Missouri Department of Corrections is working with the hub on supply chain automation wraps.

00:00:47 Alex Earls

Hi, my name is Alex Earls. I work for the Missouri Department of Corrections. I oversee the reentry services that our state provides. It's really exciting. I have a passion to see individuals be able to come up incarceration and be successful in our communities as they become our neighbors.

00:01:04 Narrator

Why are RAPs a good solution for training and upskilling incarcerated individuals?

00:01:09 Alex Earls

I saw an avenue with apprenticeship programs, and when I took this role on I really got excited because I'm like, how do I get my people who are incarcerated an avenue to come out who are trained, who can help solve some of our workforce needs, uh, in there in our state? And I, and I view Registered Apprenticeship Programs as a great avenue for us to be able to upskill our folks, get them job ready, and then just link them into an employer who is skilled and then just ready to work.

00:01:36 Alex Earls

Um, but one of the things that we've really identified here in Missouri is a need for, you know, the manufacturing space in the workforce area there. Missouri is pretty large in the manufacturing area, not as big as other states, but we still have a big need for manufacturers.

So one thing that we've identified, especially with the help of MSG, we've been able to really see that, you know, how do we begin to upscale our folks to get them into these jobs? How do we... how can we make all this work and, and we're beginning to create a program. We're going to be looking at some certified production technician type training, some logistics trainings. Um, different things like that, to really get our population ready to enter the workforce to help with those demands.

00:02:18 Narrator

How do your apprentices benefit from participating in a RAP?

00:02:22 Alex Earls

Employment is a driver to successful- to success for our folks who are reentering, but what are we doing? How are we making sure that our trainings are relevant are valid to industry demands and registered friendship programs really do provide that, so they have a lot of guidance and then they make sure that we're meeting industry demands. So we're really excited to, you know, build upon some of the ones that we already have established, but also create new ones and look for industry partners.

00:02:48 Alex Earls

These give them a sense of a value of self-worth. They begin to really identify that, "Hey, I can be somebody. I can accomplish something. I can actually make a life." You know, "I spent these last couple of years in here, and I don't want to come back."

00:03:02 Alex Earls

I mean, that's that's one huge thing that we begin to see with the with apprenticeship programs, that we were able to offer without a doubt, in my mind, employment drives everything. So if you look at kind of the barriers to successful re-entry, right? So we're looking at those things, so employment is a big huge factor in that.

00:03:19 Alex Earls

But housing and transportation are two other massive factors. But not, you can't have reliable transportation without a steady job. So if we look at those types of things, everything drives back off of employment, so it really does. If they can get in, they live, they get paid a solid wage that they can live on.

I mean that all the other pieces start to formulate back together, and if we look at, you know, a lot of our opportunities in the manufacturing space, they provide different benefits, they provide stuff like that, which is huge for these folks.

00:03:48 Narrator

What is the value of a RAP to your employer partners, particularly when considering hiring formerly incarcerated individuals?

00:03:55 Alex Earls

Uhm, you know, the felony background and, and those different things is a barrier that our folks have to overcome. But if we can provide them, you know, the certification that says, you know, "I'm trainable, I have learned these skills, I am proficient in them."

It really does give the employer a peace of mind that says, you know, "I'm not just going to take out on somebody who just has a felony conviction. But they're now, they're coming out, yeah, they made some poor choices in their background, but they have skills they have trained. They have these things and then they can become an asset in our company."

00:04:27 Alex Earls

There's a lot of the conversations we're having in today's world as employers struggle to find qualified folks, as they struggle to find employees just in general, they're really beginning to open their eyes. Some, they're they're changing some of their HR policies.

00:04:40 Alex Earls

They're really looking differently at hiring individuals who have made some poor choices back in their backgrounds.

00:04:47 Narrator

Do you have any advice for others considering starting a RAP?

00:04:51 Alex Earls

Don't let the process bog you down. Don't let some of the challenges hinder your vision of really, truly making a difference in individuals' lives. So oftentimes you can look at the process, you can say that's just such a big mountain that we have to overcome. But at the end of the day, to see people become successful, to go back home to their families, to provide for their families, to do all those types of things... It just really--you can't put a price tag on that. Our time is all valuable, but it's worth, it's worth going through those obstacles.

00:05:21 Alex Earls

It's worth, you know, thinking differently. It's worth, you know, really looking at your population and saying, "Hey, they have potential. We need to give them the avenue to be to achieve their potential, and Registered Apprenticeships are a great avenue for us to be able to provide that.

00:05:37 Alex Earls

And you know, so as we look at employers, as we look at these types of things, as we look to help solve the labor shortages that the nation is facing, I highly encourage you to look for different ways, you know.

00:05:50 Alex Earls

Talk to your leaders, talk to them and see, you know, "What could we do differently? How can we," you know, "leverage what we're doing currently within our facilities and look at those, and how can we make sure everything just works cohesively together, and ultimately making an impact on the individuals' lives who are within our facilities?"

00:06:09 Narrator

Thank you so much for listening to the Hub's interview series. Please visit our website at scworkforcehub.com for more information about the Hub and the services and supports we offer.