

Diversity + Inclusion Best Practices Case Study

HM Manufacturing:
Internships and Apprenticeships
Targeting Diverse Young Adult Populations



About HM Manufacturing

HM Manufacturing is a small, family-owned and operated company based in Wauconda, Illinois, just north of Chicago. With a staff of about 20 employees, they manufacture power transmission components and offer custom assembly services and engineering support. Founded by Kenneth W. Wolter and currently run by Nicole Wolter, they have been in business since 1979.

Program Summary

When President and CEO Nicole Wolter took over the operations of HM Manufacturing, she saw an opportunity to break away from some long-standing traditions and cultural norms that were preventing her company from adapting to a changing industry. She knew she wanted to see a broader assortment of people represented in her company, people who were not commonly being brought into the manufacturing sector. For HM, that meant increasing the number of women, people of color, and young adults working at the company. “I am all about helping the next generation,” she says, “and helping minorities and other people who don’t understand what manufacturing is.” Wanting to help bring more girls and young women into the industry, Nicole started working with area high schools to help identify girls who would be interested in interning with a manufacturing company.

HM has two paths for the high school interns they bring in. They can either learn about the business side of the organization or learn about the manufacturing side. Manufacturing interns who want to continue their work with HM after they graduate enter an apprenticeship program to teach them technical skills that will allow them to grow their careers in manufacturing. The apprenticeship, which is registered with the Department of Labor, allows workers to gain valuable industry experience in the workplace, collect a paycheck, and build their skills through training at a local community college or training center. HM covers the costs of their training as long as the apprentices commit to working at HM for one full year after the program ends.

Tags



Internships and apprenticeships

Launch Time



N/A

Location



Wauconda, Illinois

Budget



\$

Complexity



1 out of 3 light bulbs

“There are no excuses because you are a small company. If I’m doing it, everyone else can do it.”

– Nicole Wolter, President and CEO.”

Program Impact

Under Nicole's leadership, the internship and apprenticeship programs have blossomed over the years. Nicole began to focus on bringing in more members of the Latino community, as well. Eventually she started working with local community organizations that were focused on helping underserved communities on the south side of Chicago. These relationships have led to HM flourishing with a young and diverse workforce, and these efforts continue to pay off as new and potential employees can look around the facility, see people close to their age who look like them, and envision the kind of future they could have by starting as an intern or apprentice with HM.

Currently, the average age of workers at HM is 34 years old, well below the average age for the industry as a whole. The invigoration of youth into the company has helped a lot in developing a workforce that is open to new ideas and new technologies. When Nicole wants to bring in new software or new machines, her young adult workers are up for the challenge.

Having young talent on both the business and manufacturing side of the company helps HM and their training programs continue to succeed. Interns have helped grow HM's social media presence, which allows the company to show potential interns and apprentices how these programs are changing lives.



Steps for Implementation

1. For internships, begin by forming relationships with local high schools. Nicole did this by joining associations that provide funding to area schools and forming relationships with administrators and teachers. Now, teachers reach out to her when they have a student who might be interested in an internship, and apprenticeship, or full-time work.
2. For a registered apprenticeship, once you are established with the Department of Labor, match the requirements for training to what you do at your company. Match the task to what would work best for them in their coursework. Curate your training program to the work the apprentice is focused on. Once that training program is in place, it can be used repeatedly.
3. Continuously work to create networks that will allow both internship and apprenticeships programs to flourish. For training, this means high schools, community colleges, and training providers in the area. For building pipelines into diverse communities, this means community and youth-serving organizations. Much of the work building these programs has to happen outside of the company itself.

Best Practices

- Developing a diverse workforce makes it easier to maintain a diverse workforce. If a potential employee sees people who look like them already doing the jobs, they are more likely to be interested in joining the team. It is important to be relatable to younger workers and interns, both in your personality as a leader, and also in having a workplace that feels relatable.
- Allow yourself to learn from your young interns. People from the younger generation are going to make up your workforce. Learn what motivates them, how they talk and think, and what their expectations are for a job and for an employer. This is what keeps companies relevant and moving forward.
- Invest in networking activities, whether they be face-to-face or social networks. Nicole says that “owners need to be more network savvy. Everyone gets so consumed with the daily grind that they forget that you need to work outside your business.” Many more opportunities will pop up when you are out in the world trying to figure out the best way to meet your company’s needs.

