

ETHAN & THE COLORADO WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

Tapping New Full-Time Talent through Apprenticeship



Apprenticeship to Inform Our Work

For the Colorado Department of Labor and Education (CDLE) and its Colorado Workforce Development Council (CWDC), youth apprenticeship holds the opportunity to showcase an innovative form of workforce development in action. The vision of the CWDC is that “every Colorado employer has access to a skilled workforce and every Coloradan has the opportunity for meaningful employment, resulting in individual and statewide economic prosperity.” Recognizing and promoting youth apprenticeship as a way to achieve that vision, the leaders of the agency are walking the walk and have a successful program within their own workplace. CWDC added a powerhouse young colleague to their team, apprentice Ethan Bui, and created a richer appreciation and understanding of the role youth apprenticeship can play in the state’s workforce development.

Seeing Potential in Unique Skills

When Ethan first came to the program as a Cherry Creek High School junior, he had limited work experience. “During his interview it caught the team’s attention that Ethan had a YouTube channel — with significant traffic and followers,” said supervisor Madison Murphy. “When we asked him about it, he walked us through how he had wanted to get more involved in this online community. It was a channel where he reviewed and made social commentary on video games, but what it showed us, as a potential employer, is he was someone interested in how technology can be a broker for effective communications.”

Apprenticeship is More Than an Internship

Initially reserved and very quiet, Ethan’s supervisors say they threw a lot of information at him in the first year of his apprenticeship. “Integrating into a state agency, learning all of the acronyms — it can take some time to grasp of the work we do, and how things are structured,” said Murphy. But taking the time to invest in a young colleague is one of the hallmarks of apprenticeship, and knowing an apprentice will be on board for multiple years, rather than a few short weeks across a summer — as is typical in the less rigorous internship model — promotes a deeper training and learning process. “The time span of an apprenticeship makes a huge difference for an employer — particularly one as multi-faceted as a state agency,” said Britta Blodgett, Ethan’s second supervisor at the agency. “It takes a reasonable amount of time to

bring someone up to speed, so to have them be with us for three years, and not depart just as they are beginning to understand the lay of the land, is critical to the meaningful employment of an apprentice.”

Blodgett emphasized how the multi-year commitment and the team’s willingness to approach an apprentice as a colleague, first and foremost, was vital to success. “Sure, Ethan was an apprentice, but first and foremost, he is a colleague. Everyone really embraced that. And that’s how he presented himself and engaged in the work.” Added Murphy, “Ethan began taking on mission-critical assignments and building a track record. Pretty quickly people in other departments would no longer identify him as ‘just an apprentice’ because he was able to stand up as an employee and a colleague on the merits of his contributions. I think that was important in terms of how youth apprenticeship is perceived and seen across the entire agency.”

Salesforce Administration, CSM Systems Design and Stakeholder Engagement

In his three years, the young student who initially impressed his hiring committee with a YouTube channel has earned more than seven Salesforce certifications, and was critical to the successful design and implementation of a top-to-bottom CRM within the agency. “Ethan’s skills go beyond the knowledge and application of technical skills,” said Blodgett. “He’s been able to effectively navigate government systems and lobby and communicate with a whole host of stakeholders. Ethan even developed trainings and provided learning opportunities, including hosting office hours for agency staff.”

His communication skills were complemented by his ability to approach a problem from the vantage point of each stakeholder’s unique perspective. As he worked with the CWDC to get a new grant in to the system, making its application easier for users, he also assured departments like finance and procurement that their workflows would remain unchanged, with only the skin of the application process changing. Ethan’s ability to tailor technology to suit the needs of people throughout the agency was a hallmark of his success.

“You’re Hired” — A Win-Win-Win

Today, his three-year apprenticeship behind him, Ethan is well on his way towards earning a degree in Information Systems and Management at University of Colorado Denver — and accepted a full-time position with the CWDC. As part of the Strategic Business Technology group, he’ll continue serving as a Salesforce Administrator and further develop his career path. “I know a lot more about what I want out of my college experience and my career as a result of my apprenticeship,” said Ethan. “Ethan has been a fantastic contributor to our team. It’s been a win-win-win,” concluded Blodgett “It is a win for us we have had this great person to work with and will get to continue to work with him. It is a win for Ethan who launched his career with us. And it’s a win for CDLE to have this new young person in a full-time role after his apprenticeship.”

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