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Employer Network Advancing Digital Skills & Equity

Digital Skills Spotlight

The Employer Network Advancing Digital Skills and Equity is a peer network of employers from across industry sectors who are working together to ensure the country's workers, learners, and communities have the digital access and digital skills essential for thriving in a post-COVID digital economy. The Employer Network leverages their collective reach and deep understanding of employer and community needs to share information and accelerate widespread scaling of high quality, employer-recognized resources, training, and effective practices to build digital resilience. This Digital Skills Spotlight series was created to help share the experiences of participating companies in building the digital resilience of their workforce and those in their communities. For more information on the Employer Network and how you can engage, visit https://digitalus.org/employer-network. This transcript has been edited for brevity and clarity.

Bethany Tate Cornell,
SVP Chief Learning and Development Officer, McDonald's Corporation

Digital Skills Spotlight:
McDonalds leverages technology to empower learners at all levels

Featuring Bethany Tate Cornell, SVP Chief Learning and Development Officer, McDonald's Corporation

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EN: Thank you for joining us Bethany. Perhaps we should begin by asking you to help us understand how your digital skill needs for frontline workers changed over the last couple of years?

Bethany Tate Cornell: Thank you for having me.

Our needs have changed as our industry has evolved. It was well underway before COVID, but COVID accelerated the technology disruption of the hospitality industry. Because of safety alone, people want to go touchless. Our customers are no different. Our acceleration came in a few forms. One is access. If you think about our learning method, a lot of our learning was virtual or digital, but some of our critical, mandatorily required learning was face to face. We had to pause and step back and ask how we could drive greater access to learning and the accelerate learning to ensure that our workforce was upskilled and reskilled. And ready to serve a customer base that was requiring new types of engagement. If you think about how hospitality has shifted in our quick serve restaurant (QSR) industry, with mobile order, mobile pay, using our apps, there were new types of service and delivery. We really drove access.

We also leveraged technology to democratize learning in our broader employee base in general, but in particular, in our restaurants. And in some cases, it was life changing. If we think about our general managers, there was a requirement to come to a Hamburger University campus location for required learning to be ready to take on a General Manager role. By us pivoting and thinking differently about how that learning can occur, we created an opportunity for people who may have never been a General Manager before and have had potential to be one. For example, if they couldn't travel for a variety of reasons (like childcare), that opportunity wasn't open to them. When we think of access, it's not just how we can be training our broader workforce faster in a more distributed way, but how we can drive greater access for people who may not have been able to take the learning or been eligible for our leadership positions because they weren't able to come to face to face training.

We were also leveraging technology in a big way because we had to be able to get to our crew, sometimes within an hour's notice of things that were happening. Because of the dynamics of our workforce, people would have family members become exposed, and they had to go into quarantine, and they had to change their shift. So, when we think about the connection that accelerated, we started deploying different technology in our system, using social network channels, to provide mobile enabled access that allows our restaurants to communicate directly to crew. Connection has been critical. It's provided a lifeline to responsiveness and safety. This better connection also started to create a sense of peer-to-peer connection with the crew communicating with their fellow crew, and managers communicating with crew. The response has been overwhelmingly positive.

In addition to access and connection, the third area that I would mention is innovation in learning. For example, we launched training

to support our new loyalty program launch this year in the United States. And when I think about how we're deploying that learning, we did that in a way that was using gamification and was allowing our crew to be incentivized to learn. It was called "Learn and Earn". And the response was, again, overwhelmingly positive from our crew. So was their response rate and consumption of the learning.

Those are three big factors that I would say, without a doubt, have been key in our ability to accelerate the digital evolution for our organization.

EN: When we talk about digital resilience and equity, what does that mean for your company and why is it important?

Bethany Tate Cornell: As I said earlier, technology is the enabler of digital. and is a way to democratize learning. If you talk about equity, we already talked about who may not have received learning, that is now receiving learning because we're driving greater access.

If we think about the ways in which some of the learning has been deployed, the equity piece is allowing for diverse learning needs. Some of our learning was very continuous; it was repetitive, and we've digitalized some of that learning. We have also addressed equity from the standpoint of learning styles and the learners' needs. I can now take it when I need to take it, how I need to take it. We also advanced equity by adapting our learning deployment because people learn in unique and different ways. Technology became both an enabler and a driver for us.

EN: What are the biggest challenges your company faces in building a digital resilient and equitable workforce?

Bethany Tate Cornell: First and foremost, change management.

That was a challenge that we had to lean into. What does excellence and service look like

in this new omni-channel environment? Is there one gold standard? Are there different standards based on the way I'm engaging with the customer through mobile order pay, through delivery, or through drive thru? And so, we had to really think about how we needed to have our restaurant teams think differently about that service experience, not in any way lowering the standard, but redefining it based on the channel by which they provide the service.

Also, how do we make service not feel transactional? A lot of people asked, "What's my role if we're going to use this technology?" and "What does service really look like for me?". I think about my restaurant training last December when I was gloved and masked and working alongside my crew trainer. He was teaching me what service looks like walking out to curbside pickup and hand delivering an order to a customer. One of the key lessons he taught me was personalization. He showed me what difference it makes when you walk up to the car and say, "Lauren, hi, welcome. Good morning. Here's your order." So when we think about challenges with technology, it was also an opportunity for us to think differently about personalization and enhance both the employee and customer experience.

Thinking about access in a different way, how do we create the space for our crew to receive the learning that is not competing with other factors – which is just a fact of life for any virtual learning. When we think about the speed of change of what we're doing, and the speed of change of our industry, we have to realize that this is not a destination. This is a journey. This is an evolution of our experience and of our customer experience that will be ongoing. The speed of technology change requires us to be constantly looking at the customer experience and what they expect and require. And how do we stay ahead of their needs and demands and prepare our crew to provide that service in a new way? From

a change management challenge, this means not getting complacent with changes already underway and to be always looking forward to what is next, based on what's working and what isn't in the current digital environment for our customers. And, we need to be agile. That's a requirement that's always going to be forefront.

The other challenge is that we have competing priorities, which in many ways are complementary. We launched the new Chicken Sandwich this year, and we were launching digital and loyalty training for crew at the same time. So how do we help them understand how those two rollouts connect? Digital is going to help you launch chicken. It connects and enables them by having the skills and the tools to launch that new product in a new way. So those are some of the things that I would cite that I feel were challenges, but also opportunities.

EN: *What are some of the steps that you're taking to address these challenges?*

Bethany Tate Cornell: When I think about the relevance and the consistency of what we do, I think about the fact that we built many of our learning solutions with cross functional teams who were out on the front lines, serving the customer every day. This not only helped elevate the impact and the voices of our crew and our managers, but it helps ensure relevance. We can create learning that seems relevant, but what is the real time feedback of someone out there actually trying to implement it. We have recurring operating rhythms we connect on: How is it going? How is it being received? What challenges are you facing? Is there something we didn't think of? That co-creation and learner design principle is vital. It will absolutely continue as a way of doing business.

Another way to address challenges of digital resiliency is to share best practices. We are hearing so many great things happening in our restaurants across the world: How the crew are

implementing the tools we are providing and how they are launching our new programs. Raising those up and sharing more broadly is key. My assistant has been with the company 41 years, and she told me when I first started, "the answers are always in the restaurants." We must continue to be listeners – to be in the restaurants and connect to our learners.

EN: *What are some of the results that you are seeing?*

Bethany Tate Cornell: The feedback, overall, is tremendous. When I think about the loyalty training program, we've had 369,000+ completions in the United States. More importantly, our learner impact was high with an average net promoter score of 97%.

The learners are telling us the training is effective, they are adopting it, and most importantly – it is valuable to them. This creates pull. For example, we recently expanded the launch of this loyalty training program to Canada. There is a high degree of readiness and eagerness to use the new content, tools, and resources we've created. We're continuing to roll out many of these programs to more geographies outside the US. And we're continuing to learn from each of those deployments to strengthen the next one.

EN: *What's next for you as you look ahead over the next year or two to build a digital resilient workforce?*

Bethany Tate Cornell: We must continue to enhance our digital education approach and strategy. Let me say it this way: a world class digital workforce is about access to information, transparency of information, and ease of doing the job. Using that as a North Star, we need to continue to look at all our learning and think about it with that lens. As I mentioned earlier, one of our key principles is co-creation with learners around the company. We've conducted many

interviews, focus groups, and design labs with learners this year and will continue them over time. They are helping us to design the future of learning at McDonald's for corporate staff and for restaurants. We must identify those strategic drivers that will enable us to stay relevant and to stay ahead.

Our Learning and Development strategy is based on three key pillars: modernize delivery, accelerate capabilities, and transform experiences. Again, our successful loyalty training program was all about bringing this whole learning approach to life. We transformed experiences through gamification, modernized delivery through mobile enablement, and accelerated capabilities through digital skilling. And the learners responded so well to it. We're in a place of innovating and pioneering with each new program we create. And we are looking at this broader vision of the future of learning for McDonald's, and what our multi-year journey is to get there. And that is huge, right?

The pandemic is still upon us. The pandemic required us to lean into the changing needs and requirements of our learners. How do we position them and set them up for success regardless of their life situation and needs? And how do we create even greater flexibility? What options, choices, and accessibility do we need to allow people to flourish and thrive in our organization? And how do we think differently about our way of recognizing credentials? How do we think about the acknowledgement and recognition of what our learners are doing today in our system? And how do we give them credentials towards that to help them then grow and accelerate in the company? How do we recognize those as true credentials to readiness for the next level?

Those are some of the things that we're looking at as we look at the span of our future, and it's quite exciting.