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# How Apprenticeship Will Save The American Economy

President [Barack Obama](#) has [proclaimed](#) this week – November 1 through November 7 – as National Apprenticeship Week. States the President, “during National Apprenticeship Week, we recognize the ways apprenticeships foster innovation and prosperity, and we recommit to encouraging and supporting those who offer and partake in them.”



AP Photo/Steve Aldridge

Apprenticeship is the western world’s oldest form of occupational training, and for good reason. By learning first-hand from an experienced tradesperson, an apprentice acquires mastery of a trade, inside and out. It is a hands-on method that equips participants with exactly the right skills and experience to transition directly into a particular job. Modern apprenticeships have countless advantages for employers and the economy as a whole, as well as for anyone at any stage of life, looking to launch a successful, well-paid, and fulfilling career.

This year, the Obama Administration committed \$175 million to encourage and expand apprenticeship across the U.S., and in his FY 2016 budget the President asked Congress for another \$2 billion to establish an Apprenticeship Training Fund.



The timing is not accidental. The recent recession has made it difficult for many low-skilled workers to get jobs that pay enough to keep themselves and their families above the poverty line. Even many college graduates do not have the skills for jobs in the modern economy. At the same time, many jobs stay vacant because employers can't find qualified people to fill them.

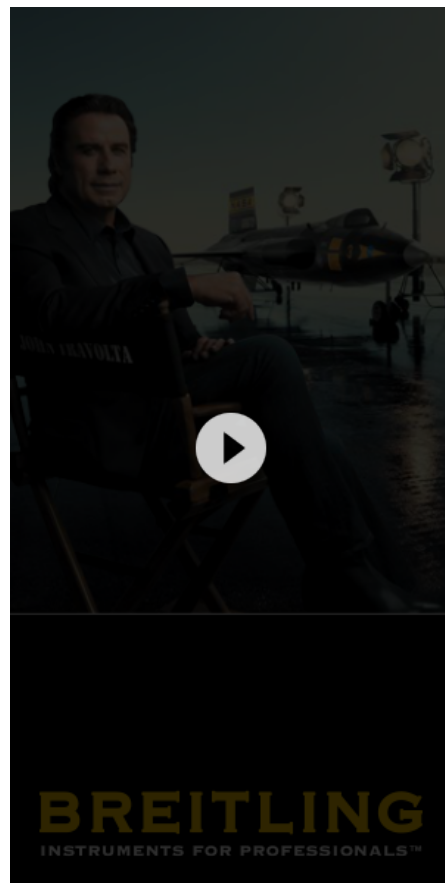
Apprenticeship training offers a lifeline to both workers and employers. As the President notes in his proclamation, "apprenticeships help people upgrade their skills and keep pace with the demands of the 21st century."

We all know that work has changed – the type of work we do, the skills required to do it, and the people doing the work. Apprenticeships have changed as well. Traditionally, apprenticeships were focused in the construction trades (and occupied mostly by men), whereas modern apprenticeships encompass a broad range of career areas – including IT, healthcare and finance.

Even older fields, such as manufacturing, are undergoing modern makeovers. No longer is factory work a low-skilled assembly line job. Instead, highly skilled technicians work to install, adjust and maintain complicated machinery and computer systems that run the modern plant. And all of these fields are equally open to both men and women.

To work in any of these fields requires skills. But not necessarily a four-year degree. Imagine coming out of high school – or undergoing a job transition, voluntary or involuntary – and being able to land a well-paying job in computer programming or health care systems after only two years of paid, on-the-job training and classroom instruction. Imagine assisting in the operating room or installing and maintaining complicated factory machinery. You might also get a college credential – a Certificate or an Associate's Degree – with no student debt.

States have already committed to apprenticeship programs. South Carolina has been running Apprenticeship Carolina for several years, bringing together employers, community colleges and the state Department of Labor to design high-quality apprenticeships that meet employer needs and give workers in-demand skills and training. Over the last seven years, apprenticeships in South Carolina have grown from less than 100 to over 10,000.



And in Minnesota, the state legislature recently passed MN PIPELINE, an initiative that brings employers, local colleges and state officials together to develop occupational skill standards in four areas where job growth is expected to be high: advanced manufacturing, healthcare services, IT and agriculture. The state also allocated money for education grants for the classroom training part of their apprenticeship.

These are high-quality programs, with carefully thought out standards that lead to well-paid jobs. Many people who gain skills via apprenticeship continue to learn and advance throughout their careers; and with recognized, transferable skills, can easily change careers. Others go back to college and get four-year degrees, or even advanced degrees.

What has already begun in some states is now backed by the President, senior policy makers and industry. The major Democratic candidates for President back apprenticeship and skills training as well – although this is not a partisan issue. South Carolina has a solidly Republican state legislature and Minnesota has a split legislature – Republican House and Democratic Senate. Both parties can see the value of creating opportunities for people who need and want skills training, while helping employers fill the technical jobs that power their businesses.

I believe we are on the cusp of a skills-based revolution. For low-skilled workers who need training; college graduates who find they lack the skills for today's technical jobs; or anyone who is sick of the cubicle life and wants hands-on, concrete work that rewards both the soul and the bank account, an apprenticeship can launch you into a rewarding and well-paid career.

Individual workers, employers and the U.S. economy can only benefit.

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