

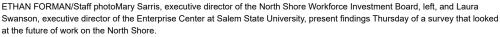
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FEATURED

Future of Work survey shows disconnect between jobs, young people

By Ethan Forman Staff Writer Jun 22, 2017







SALEM — Employers on the North Shore covet workers who above all show an ability and willingness to learn, a new workforce survey released Thursday morning shows.

"In the future, everyone has to learn," said Mary Sarris, executive director of the North Shore Workforce Investment Board, a co-sponsor of the Future of Work on the North Shore survey.

Administered over the past 18 months, the survey provides a snapshot of the skills or interests that might be demanded of the future North Shore workforce, and what careers job seekers and students see for themselves in the future. It includes 1,668 responses from employers, educators, students, job seekers and officials.

Employers also said they want future employees to be fluent in technology and able to work with a diverse set of colleagues.

The survey was a collaboration of the workforce investment board and the North Shore Alliance for Economic Development, which is housed at the Enterprise Center at Salem State University. The workforce investment board oversees the North Shore Career Center, which oversees federally funded job and training services in 19 communities.

A packed audience heard the survey's findings Thursday at Salem State University.

Disconnect among young workers

The results were set against the notion that the region's workers are older — 30 percent fall within the ages of 24 to 44 years old, 19.1 percent are 45 to 54 years old, and 15.3 percent are 55 to 64 years old. Just 8.3 percent are ages 20 to 24.

The survey also showed a deep disconnect among millennials when it came to pursuing jobs in health care, construction, manufacturing and financial services. While local workforce officials consider these sectors critical to the North Shore, students surveyed aren't interested in pursuing them.

On average, millennials surveyed said they were "somewhat likely" to go into health care, the North Shore's top industry with nearly 35,000 workers last year. But students said they were "not very likely" to pick a career in construction, manufacturing and financial services.

Presenters said these responses show students don't know what jobs are available in these particular industries. They said workforce officials and educators need to do a better job connecting students to careers in these fields.

Nancy Stager, chairwoman of the North Shore Workforce Investment Board and executive vice president for human resources and charitable giving at Eastern Bank, said the survey can help companies "find the employees with the right skills to do what they need to do." It explores the ever-shifting balance between what companies demand for workers in terms of skills, and what skills job seekers need.

New jobs in demand include universal banker (someone who can do many functions in a bank beyond being a teller), social media manager, network security technician, customer experience analyst, IT developer, digital marketing and autism specialist.

Importance of the willingness to learn

One of the most interesting findings was that employers see an "ability/willingness to learn" as the top future skill set, followed by technology fluency, the ability to work with diverse colleagues, the ability to learn a foreign language and better math skills.

Donald Westermann, chief information officer at Eastern Bank, said in an interview that employers want future hires to have the ability to learn in part because of the ongoing technological disruption. In the banking world, this translates to customers moving away from branches to online banking and mobile apps.

"The things were are doing now as opposed to three years ago is immensely different," Westermann said. "Long gone is the day when you come in and do the same thing every day."

About four years ago, Eastern Bank hired an outside company to change over its mobile banking technology. Westermann said it's close to releasing a new mobile platform, designed in-house.

"We felt we needed to have more control of that," he said.

The large-scale task has proven a challenge for the bank's system and software engineers. And Stager said the switch has "downstream implications" for the bank's 1,900 employees, many of whom have to learn to navigate the new platform to help customers.

That, she said, is why the ability to learn, coupled with technology fluency, is so important.



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