

MONEY MATTERS

Tuition Support Advances Workforce

By Charlee Beasor

Workforce development is top of mind for Hoosier businesses, higher education institutions and the state. Though the emphasis is often on the workforce of the future, employers can also support their current associates.

One avenue is through offering tuition support as an employee benefit, whether that takes the form of reimbursement, working out a deferred payment plan or even covering an employee's tuition costs.

While it can be a large investment, the benefits are numerous, offers Dena Jacquay, chief human resources officer at Parkview Health in Fort Wayne.

"In the end, the total number that we invest in this is well worth the investment," she offers.

Jacquay relays that 527 employees utilized some form of tuition assistance in 2017. She also has personal experience with the tuition reimbursement program, having earned her master's degree from WGU Indiana.

She's bold in her assessment of the financial help and the culture of support at Parkview Health.

"I have to say, I don't know that I could have done it without the organization's support," Jacquay asserts.

"When you're trying to balance family, work and add school to the mix, it was wonderful for not only the organization to give me flexibility in my schedule, but if I was really working on a paper or needed some extra time to really focus, that was absolutely supported."

Parkview Health offers \$4,000 per year in tuition support for "mission critical" positions and \$2,000 for all others. To take advantage, associates must be employed at least six months and have at least half-time status. The goal for Parkview is to fill the company's talent pipeline and keep it coming.

"The number of people who transfer from one job to the next after they graduate – we are keeping those individuals. They are not leaving the area or not leaving Parkview and can transfer into a role that better meets their skills," she says.

"Above all, we're investing in our future, in our talent pipeline. We want to support the goals of our co-workers."

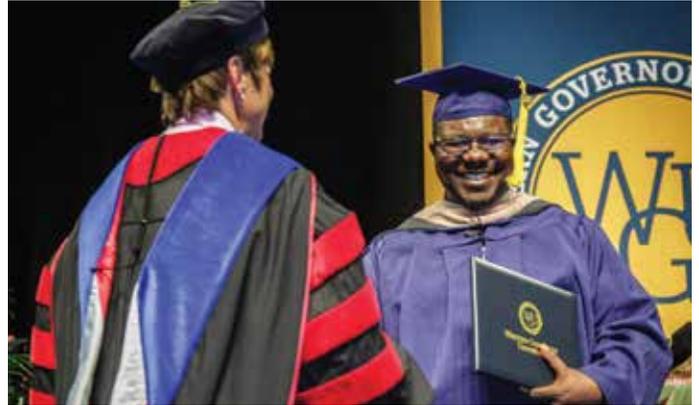
Thread of talent development

Brad Rhorer, assistant senior manager of human resources at Subaru of Indiana Automotive (SIA) in Lafayette, has been with the organization for over 25 years. He started in the production department and has held several positions throughout his tenure. He decided to attain his master's degree at WGU Indiana for personal reasons.

"There's potential benefit to any organization to continue education, but for me it was more personal in that I've worked through my entire career and did education at the same time. I didn't go to college right out of school," he says.

He points to SIA's management team as other good examples of education opportunity leading to internal development and long-term careers.

"Education is why they're able to grow here internally. Our management team, probably 90% of it grew internally somehow," he adds.



Employers around Indiana are offering tuition support to employees to upgrade or complete their degrees. Partnerships with institutions like WGU Indiana help adult learners fit education into their busy lives.



Rhorer says SIA covers 100% of bachelor's degree tuition costs for employees, depending on the career path. The company has a partnership with Purdue University and offers the degree on-site. Tuition deferment has also taken much of the financial burden off employees' shoulders.

"We need to be preparing our workforce for sustainability and the best way to do that is continuing education. If you want to continue to grow and stabilize your workforce for growth, you have to continue that education to maintain it," he notes.

Passing it on

Jenny Shrum is a professional development specialist at Good Samaritan Hospital in Vincennes. She chose WGU Indiana to pursue her master's degree and is now a nursing instructor for WGU in the pre-licensure program at the hospital.

She was drawn to the school's competency-based model, allowing her to use her 17 years of experience as an employee at Good Samaritan to attain her degree.

"I know it has helped me in my current role in education, which is where I think I belong. It helped me get the job at WGU, which in turn helped me at my full-time job at Good Samaritan. This is helping me

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toward further goals that I have in education,” she mentions.

Good Samaritan, she explains, offers full-time employees \$5,200 per year in tuition support at the graduate level.

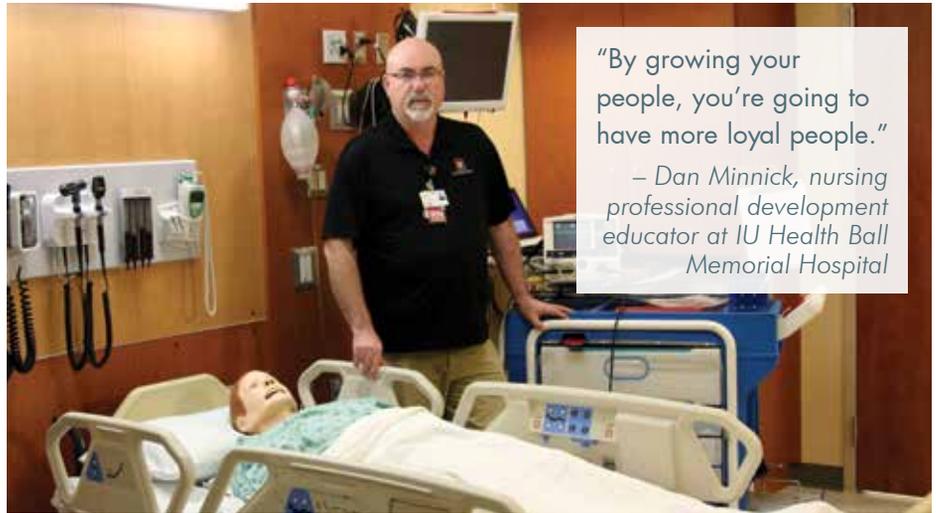
“I took out a student loan for the first term and then whenever I finished that term I was able to quickly turn over my tuition reimbursement, use that for the second term and just maybe have a couple hundred dollars left over and used WGU’s payment plan, so it was great,” she says.

“When you have that financial backing and support, it does give you a little motivation to get it done.”

Giving back as a student mentor is something WGU Indiana graduate Dan Minnick is looking forward to someday. Minnick is a nursing professional development educator at IU Health Ball Memorial Hospital in Muncie and earned his master’s degree using the hospital’s tuition assistance program.

“I can’t speak well enough both about WGU and IU Health. WGU is a fabulous organization. My retirement job is I want to work for WGU. That’s my goal, retire and have my retirement job working from home and being a student mentor. I don’t want to clip those bonds with WGU; they were fabulous,” he maintains.

The value in giving employees tuition support is tremendous, Minnick contends.



“By growing your people, you’re going to have more loyal people.”

– Dan Minnick, nursing professional development educator at IU Health Ball Memorial Hospital

“By growing your people, you’re going to have more loyal people,” he offers.

Building an emotional connection with employees is one of the biggest payouts, Jacquay conveys.

“You know you are being supported by the organization. You’re accountable to yourself, but you have this sense of accountability to the organization as well. The payback is you give them time. ... It’s an emotional commitment to an organization, being an engaged co-worker.”

‘Doesn’t have to be monumental’

Jacquay suggests that employers

considering launching a tuition reimbursement program can start small.

“With talent being any organization’s most valued resource, it’s an investment in the future and so anywhere you start is good. It doesn’t have to come out and be this elaborate program. You don’t have to be paying top dollar. Any investment will still have an impact,” she offers.

“You can start smaller and grow over time. It doesn’t have to be monumental to invest in your pipeline, especially when the war for talent is becoming more difficult. That’s money well spent. You can easily show the return on investment on those (dollars).”

RESOURCES: Dena Jacquay, Parkview Health, at www.parkview.com | Brad Rhorer, Subaru of Indiana Automotive, at www.subaru-sia.com | Dan Minnick, IU Health Ball Memorial Hospital, at iuhealth.org/ball-memorial | Jenny Shrum, Good Samaritan Hospital, at www.gshvin.org