EXECUTIVE INSIGHTS

Workforce Development

Experts discuss the latest talent trends

THE WORLD OF WORK HAS CHANGED DRASTICALLY SINCE THE START OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC. WE CHECKED IN WITH FOUR PROFESSIONALS WHO WATCH WORKFORCE TRENDS AND ASKED THEM TO WEIGH IN ON THE STATE OF LOUISVILLE'S WORKFORCE AND HOW SMART EMPLOYERS ARE KEEPING THEIR EMPLOYEES HAPPY, ENGAGED AND GROWING.



JONATHAN WESTBROOK

President -East & Westbrook Construction

Jonathan Westbrook has served as president of East & Westbrook Construction since 2008. Westbrook has over 20 years of construction and management experience, from working as a laborer to managing industrial and heavy commercial construction projects all over the United States. The company was established in 1977 and has experienced continuous and significant growth.



REBECCA WOOD

COO and VP Investor Development -Greater Louisville, Inc. -The Metro Chamber of Commerce

Rebecca Wood is the COO and VP Investor Development at Greater Louisville Inc., (GLI) the metro chamber of commerce. She began her chamber career in 2016 and has held various leadership roles since that time. Wood oversees a combined team of investor relations, products and sponsorships, marketing and events, workforce and talent, and DE&I. Throughout Wood's career at GLI she has found innovative ways to engage with businesses and support community growth.



ANGELA BAILEY MBA, SPHR, CCP, SHRM-SCP

Director of Business Development & HR -Hanna Resource Group

Angie Bailey joined Hanna Resource Group earlier this year as director of business development and HR services, responsible for growing the business and providing innovative solutions. Angie is an accomplished business consultant with expertise in HR, business development, technology, and people. Angie's experience includes technology, higher education, manufacturing, and nonprofit. Serving the HR profession for over 20 years, Angie is also a published author, wellness coach and speaker and trainer.



DR. NICKIE COBB Associate Vice President -Workforce Solutions; Jefferson Community & Technical College

Dr. Nickie Cobb serves as the associate vice president of workforce solutions for Jefferson Community & Technical College. She has served the local business and industry community for more than 15 years. In her role, she works closely with all sectors to build custom training and development solutions.





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MODERATOR: How has the Covid-19 andemic impacted employers? How are attitudes changing about our elationship to work and our jobs in eneral right now?

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WOOD: We definitely have seen hard changes, I will start with that., Internally, we have a high performing staff, and we thrive a lot by being in-person. That's what we're built around is meeting with businesses and being out and about in the community. So this was a drastic change for us. What we have discovered is that it is more critical than ever for managers and leadership within GLI to keep lines of communication open and make sure that our virtual door is always open because it's so easy to feel disconnected. Our employees have really expressed that they want to feel heard. they want to feel valued. And sometimes that is difficult for them in this environment. We have found that we need, more so now than ever, to make sure we're available for one-onone meetings, to listen, and really take action when they confide in you on something that they need. We've also spent a lot of time on working to simulate what we would consider social aspects of our office. We actually put standing, what we call, fun staff meetings on our calendar once a month. This has been our opportunity to engage with our staff on a higher level, both for existing employees and those that we onboarded during Covid, which have found a true difficulty to connect to our staff. So it's definitely changing, I think, their perception of how GLI works. And we, as managers, have had to change our perception of how we work every day and what's most important to those employees.

BAILEY: I would describe the workforce as frustrated, as impatient, and probably demanding. And for those who have been able to deploy remotely, work remote, there's a lot of anxiety for returning back to work. We have been working with our clients on helping them understand this anxiety. We conduct returnto-work surveys, both from a manager's perspective and from the employee's perspective. So when I say they're frustrated and they have anxiety, we actually have that information. It's really important from the employer's standpoint to acknowledge what the employees are feeling, and what the workforce is feeling, to give them a voice and have compassion for those feelings and anxieties. We all know being aware and having knowledge is a good thing, right? Helping employees transition back into a more normal work environment will be difficult. It's not just your workforce, it's the leadership as well. We all are having anxiety, if we're going to be honest.

And if you were able to have flexible work arrangements and they worked, and we have seen that in many cases they work better, it's hard to justify to your workforce that you are going to take that away. I think awareness and figuring out how to move forward and structure work differently, to provide those same arrangements will be critical for engaging and retaining your workforce.

COBB: We represent quite a few partners that have been in person the whole time, and I think they are thinking about strategies on how to keep their employees motivated, engaged, and really thinking about burnout. When you think about our health care systems where they've really been strapped and working overtime. how can they help those employees navigate?

WESTBROOK: I think one thing we all learned. whether it's for our own employees or for people that we interacted with, is a new term, "essential worker." And we've gained a new appreciation for folks on the front lines who didn't have the option to work from home. And I hope that as we move out of the pandemic, which obviously we have a lot of

optimism around, we don't forget how important those workers are and the sacrifices struggles on productivity for a bit that they make and some of the restrictions in their careers that they have. We made a lot of changes for our office staff. We were able to pivot very quickly to work from home. But it didn't take long for that preference to show that they would rather be in the office. There's so much collaboration and focus that happens in the office. We also learned a lot of great lessons from this that will stay with us. geography because you can have people work remote and leverage technology to be able to make that happen. We've also learned that a lot of the things that we did the old-fashioned way, meeting in-person, meeting face-to-face, there's a lot of efficiencies doing things virtually. I think there will be a better balance going

ODERATOR: What are the smart nployers doing to retain their workrce right now? How are we keeping olks engaged with us, so that when ve do go back, we have a leg to stand when we ask them to keep their luctivity at a high level?

lot of professional development where they're





virtually from the pandemic. I'm sure, for a lot of employers it accelerated their trust in remote work. You know, remote work has been a movement that's been coming for a while. but there's been hesitancy on how it will work. how productivity will happen and be measured. Once everyone was forced into that for safety reasons, it became the best thing to do.

WOOD: Something that we are keeping our eyes on and a growing concern that I'm hearing is, are we going to see a dip in productivity when we try to go back? When you can't sit on every call, and you can't sit in the room with somebody while you answer 20 e-mails or whatever it is. I'm interested what your thoughts are on get back more in-person.

BAILEY: I do think that we are going to see some of those productivity challenges. 100 percent yes, I do. I've seen this with some of our clients that have already been transitioning back to an office or a physical workspace. People have to relearn social skills, as

the employees that are there, their incumbent workforce, and say, what can we do to provide the training, the skills, the upgrades that will take you to the next level with their organization. And I think, too, based on what the panel has said, we know that there's this transition Some employers, they're all on site, some are a hybrid, and some are all online. We've seen a big request on leadership skills upgrades. Leading a remote team looks a little bit different than leading a team that you see every day who you can interact with and engage with every day, so they've really asked us to develop like for leading a remote team.

that efficiency or that productivity as we try to **WESTBROOK:** So much uncertainty and risk was added in the last year. A lot of workers have seen the true nature of the organization, and a lot of core values were put to the test. I think the companies that answered the bell by helping their workforce navigate through the uncertainty of the pandemic, navigate through shutdowns and employment situations, keeping themselves and their families safe and day saying, "Can we hire your students?" So well. There are many factors influencing this healthy, and showing that they really cared - it that's definitely something that we're look-

goes a long way. I think our employees and the workforce will remember that. They'll know who cared about people and took care of them and who didn't. That's something that we've always talked about as an organization. It was really challenged by the pandemic, and we tried to rise and meet that challenge. And I think that goes a long way. We have a wonderful culture at our company, and we wanted to make sure that our culture persevered through something like this and that it was a One, is that our talent pool is not restricted by **COBB:** One of the things that we've seen is a strength, an advantage and something that we could lean on and not something that was weakened by an event that no one really foresaw coming along.

I would echo what Nickie said about a lot of training, a lot of development. There's been a tremendous opportunity, and folks have learned new skills. Technology is something that's sometimes used, sometimes not in construction, and this forced everyone's hand to jump in on technology and virtual.

BAILEY: When I described the workforce as demanding, this is one of the items that I was really referring to. If you're not offering training and development, employees will go elsewhere to find it. They want it, and there are employers now, for engagement and for succession planning and other purposes, who are offering it more than ever. I would also add that it's important for engagement to understand what motivates your employees. And that you know what the barriers are to engagement, to communication, and to commitment even. It's really important that, whether it's a stay interview or an engagement survey, or some sort of ongoing tool or means of gaining that feedback, that employers really understand what those factors and barriers are.

MODERATOR: The world has been pened up to us in terms of trying to find w employees, but we're compe ainst the world now for talent. So in ms of recruitment. what are ployers doing to find new talent and ke working in Louisville attractive.

WOOD: Obviously, this is at the forefront for us, and it's changed a lot. You know, when we went into the pandemic, I think we were thinking from a talent attraction perspective, of recruiting from a 500-mile radius. But Covid hits and we see this dramatic opportunity to go to Silicon Valley and recruit people. We could recruit people that we never thought we could before And a lot of them were seeking to get out of the metro areas and to get into somewhere less populated. And so companies have been drastically taking advantage of this opportunity. We are seeing folks recruiting from everywhere. They have opened their eyes to the fact that remote work is OK, and somebody doesn't have to relocate to work for you. But at the same time, there is a huge opportunity to relocate people here. There's just been a really big shift. We have tailored a lot of our strategies around the remote workforce campaign. We've been looking at strategic opportunities, and for instance, we're working with a health care partner to target needed health care talent in geographical areas outside of our region that have more supply than demand for those workers. We specifically target areas that have a higher cost living and where content around what does that skill set look our pay is competitive. That is a different opportunity than I think any of our employers have ever seen in the past.

> **COBB:** One of the things that we've noticed in higher education is that when unemployment rates go up, student enrollment also goes up. We see this big influx of students or individuals that are trying to take this opportunity while they're unemployed to upgrade their skills. Employers reach out to us every



employers who have needs. We've seen a huge uptick in those requests.

WESTBROOK: I think it's not new for construction. I think one of the biggest things that could help us is if from an early age, we could grant permission for some of these hard to fill jobs in our industry to be viewed as acceptable going to grow up to be a video game designer our society, our schools, education systems, to support the opportunity and option to go into skilled trades of all sorts. We've got to create not only pathways, but encouragement for

those individuals. In our industry, we think there's a lot of rewarding benefits that are beyond just a really well-paying job with advancement opportunities. With skilled trade, you have something that sticks with you for life that you can use in a lot of different ways. You can use it to maintain and improve your home. You can use it to take on hobbies and side projects and other income streams. Also, the work itself is extremely rewarding. I think it's one of the unique things about our industry that we try to lean on for recruiting. You know, every day we get the opportunity to see the progress that we've made. And then, once our projects are completed, we get to drive through the city and show our friends and family the things we had a hand in building. I think that's really rewarding.

I think when you ask for how we can get help in recruiting, I think we've got to look at skilled trades, blue collar work, working with your hands as very valuable work that benefits everyone in our society. And rather than look down on those, celebrate them and lift up the individuals that are doing this import-

ing to help partner our current students with **BAILEY:** We know that there's been a war for they had provided a data-driven approach to our underrepresented minorities. We know we talent for a long time. It's greater now more than ever. We've seen all the impacts on the workforce from Covid and, you know, just folks either not able to work because there's been loss of childcare or due to Covid illness. First, I think the employer needs to shift their mindset. If they're still in this mindset that employees come to work for a paycheck and noble, even aspirational. Not everyone is that's really not the case. Yes, they are getting ty, but you have to start the paycheck, but they come to work for you or to get a bachelor's degree. And so we want for different reasons. It's what you represent in the community; it's what development opportunities you provide; it's what inclusive culture us for help right now you provide. Whatever those factors are that make you different and exciting and attractive for an applicant or a candidate, you need to be promoting the heck out of that. Get out of that post a job and pray for the right candidate sort of strategy. That strategy doesn't work. It hasn't worked for a very long time, and it's re- to do it right now. This ally not going to work moving forward. Also, you need to think of the candidate experience. This includes leveraging the tools and technology that everyone else has talked about, and think of it from the candidate standpoint. If they get frustrated or bored, or your application process is not super slick and easy, you've already lost them

> **IODERATOR: Applicants are more and** nore looking at diversity and equity when they apply for jobs. What should employers be doing to highlight their efforts around DEI and promoting clusive workplaces?

WOOD: We are doing a lot of work in this area, and we felt like it was an issue in our community before the social unrest that we saw in 2020. We had done some work with a

what we'll need to focus on, and inclusion was have programs that we offer at the college in the forefront of that. When you see that 23 that have barriers for underrepresented mipercent of your population is Black individuals, that only 2.4 percent of your businesses are our state government to help provide funding Black owned, that speaks volumes. It's so far for those students to help get them in path-

behind our peer cities You do have to focus on the broader communiwith getting your own house in order. A lot of companies are asking on focusing on inclusive hiring practices and inclusive culture. Do they have a formal DE&I policy? And there's this feeling that we need needs to happen right now. But something

night. It has to be that continual commitment student side and the employer side. to changing your organization. We launched a minority business accelerator called Power to Prosper in the past few weeks, and we are working to launch a racial equity pledge for businesses to sign and make that long-term commitment. You know, I think it's going to be jectives, into your culture. We all know that a culture change for our city. And when we're out talking to businesses, they're going to look at us and ask, "What's your employee diversity percentage? What's the diversity of your what they are, and posting them. We have a board of directors?" And so really putting your client that has posted them where anyone internal focus on that before you look externally, I think is critically important right now for any organization or business.

firm called Techonomy in Columbus, Ohio, and | said. We're also trying to find ways to engage | contributing to and raising awareness, which

norities to get into, so we're partnering with

ways and programs that can accelerate this and looking for Rebecca said. They're looking for help, too, and they're asking us to provide that DE&I training to their leadership and their frontline workers. The state has funding to support

I can tell you is that it doesn't happen over- that as well. So we're seeing it from both the

BAILEY: I'm going to echo both what Nickie and Rebecca have already talked about. It needs to be an ongoing effort, and it's weaving it into your strategy, into your goals and obwe measure what's important and what is important is what we measure. So setting those goals and objectives, being transparent about internal or external can see them. They've posted timelines around them. Being very intentional and transparent with those efforts is super important. And Nickie just talked about **COBB:** I would echo everything that Rebecca training. I think training goes a long way in

with a large company. One that treats its employees like family. By providing ongoing training, we place an emphasis on your development so that you learn new skills and have the opportunity to rise through the ranks. In addition, we offer the following advantages

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ANGIE BAILEY

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their career. We're definitely focused on "Training goes ways that we can help a long way in bridge that gap. And contributing our employers are doing exactly what to and raising



them back on a pathway toward success.

nization. And for much of that training, you're going to have to go external to get it. I'm happy to hear that JCTC is doing that. Metro United Way offers an awesome program; I think it's called Racial Equity Gap Training. There are lots of resources available in our community and it's a great strategy for employers to pursue those avenues. And have conversations in the workplace, making DE&I part of the conversation. Put it on meeting agendas. Making it safe to have the conversation and ask the question: "What does diversity mean to you?"

It's got to be more than a checkbox exercise and making sure that, from an HR perspective, your pay, your policies, and your practices do promote equity, diversity, and inclusion. You can work with your partners, your benefits brokers and such to make sure that your benefits are always promoting inclusion, as well.

WESTBROOK: I think that the best employers are striving to continuously improve, and starts with listening. I think that it has to be active listening from employers to really hear what experts in DE&I are putting out there as paths forward and resources that we have. And I want to highlight a couple of those that we've utilized. The first one is the Louisville Urban League. Sadiga Reynolds and her team have a number of programs and some of them are unique to our industry, like Kentuckiana Builds and mentorship programs for minority contractors. Another one that's more recent has been a grant that Louisville has received from the National Fund for Workforce

Solutions to support redesigned jobs and resilient worker initiatives here in Louisville. And

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is a big piece of promoting DE&I in your orga- to create more opportunities for economy they can specifically design it to fit their needs. have traditionally called as gaps. We're movboosting jobs, which would help everyone. As an employer, I echo everything that you-all are **WESTBROOK:** Yes, it's been a great partnersaying about what we can do internally and ship with JCTC. And there are a lot of really where that begins, but we need to be looking neat programs out there that help kickstart outside of our organizations because that's where real opportunities to learn and grow are going to come from - by hearing different perspectives and different things that are going on that we can partner with, support, and take advantage of to make a real change.

> ODERATOR: Customized training is mething that more and more loyers are turning to. What kinds f methods are employers using to grov eir own skilled workforce?

COBB: Jonathan and East & Westbrook Construction is a great example of apprenticeship, so kudos to you. That's such the buzz word across the U.S. right now, and it really is that grow-your-own model. We see such improvements and retention with our employees. And this is a clear opportunity for improvement. It it's a recruitment strategy. The nice part of it is that you can customize it. So Johnathan, for example, his team East & Westbrook build a curriculum with JCTC that fits exactly what they need. I mean, we've all attended classes at college where maybe 25 percent of it was applicable to you and 75 percent was just good to know. But what we do with apprenticeship is we make it 100 percent focused on exactly **BAILEY:** As we look at employees who want ment of your employees. what that employer partner needs, so it's very efficient. We cut out a lot of the waste and make a custom program that grows the talent that's going to meet the needs of that specific employer. An apprenticeship is a great way to give those skills to your employees. They're really flexible because an employer can create want. And this shift happened pre-pandemic this is working with employers and frontline | an apprenticeship program that's as short as | there's a shift to work more towards some-

career interest and skill development, such as the Academies of Louisville that are happening in the Jefferson County Public Schools KentuckianaWorks. But as an employer what do have a state registered apprenticeship program. And construction is no different than a lot of careers like, being a doctor or a lawyer. Those are big broad categories with lots of specialization underneath. So as an employer we have the chance to create an apprenticeship program that trains to the specializations that we're going to use as an employer and put to work. It's been a great partnership with ICTC for the classroom training and us providing the on-the-job training and supplemental instruction. So many employers are like us -They're hiring for fit and intangibles like attitude, dependability, being drug free and being willing to learn. And then, we're supplying the training and the patience that comes along with that. It's definitely a long-term investment; It's a three-year program, but it's rewarding for everybody involved.

to grow and develop into leadership positions employers are being very intentional about formal leadership development programs. And it starts with really understanding what your employees want to do and how they want to grow, what training and skills they

ing away from the old-fashioned performance reviews that highlight those gaps. There's a lot of intentional training and development that's happening around an employee's strengths and how they want to grow in those areas We're leveraging a lot of different tools and assessments to help employers with that. training programs through organizations like And the old-fashioned mentoring programs are making a comeback. I've benefited from it we're trying to do is then bridge that to the personally. There's nothing better than having next step with highly specialized training. We mentors helping and coaching and really advocating for you.

> WESTBROOK: That's something that we added in the last year, a mentoring program. We noticed that it was really helpful to show folks pathways. Our industry is unique, and even if you've worked in construction, it's different when you get into an industrial setting. It helps keep people safer, it helps them learn things quicker and it helps with productivity. It makes for a better workplace and a better culture for everyone.

> COBB: I just feel like so much of the learning happens on-the-job that all should be part of the apprenticeship. Partnering them with an excellent mentor or journeyman is really where a lot of those skills are obtained. So I echo what Angie said on mentoring and coaching. It's so important with the develop-

BAILEY: And from a leadership perspective as well. Good decision-making is hard to learn through an online class or sitting in a classroom. That really comes from those mentoring relationships

WOOD: What we have heard from so many of workers in response to the events of last year | one year, all the way up to four or five years. So | one's strengths instead of what we would | the employers we work with is that they need



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from a very strategic, laser-focused plan. We're June, and we helped put together 15 employers, currently and nine education partners – KentuckianaWorks and Goodwill and those types of institutions – and developed a network for individuals that want to go into specific tracks like nursing. The way this works, for example, is we take someone, and we put them into a don't move away from that. housekeeping position at \$11/hour. The emmonths and while they are there, they get soft skills training that will enable them to move not been what we've been able to do yet. And into a front desk position that pays \$16/hour. Maybe in that position, over the next year or so, they discover they like computers and get interested in coding. They go through Cod Louisville and get certified to be able to move into a CSR position at a tech company where they are making \$21/hour. Maybe they may go to UPS. UPS is going to bring in higher level training and agree to keep them for a year or two years. And then, maybe, they're going to spring to Norton who's going to give them that very specialized training. All of this training has been building up to where they want to go. There's an educational component, but the overall goal is to help people figure out where they want to go, How do I go from low-paying, low-skilled job to a high-paying, high-skilled, family- sustaining wage? This has worked in other communities on much smaller scales. This is what employers have really been asking us for. Help me build this pipeline, and help me get them trained before they get to me. Because they can't come out of college and have two to three years of experience. But if you put them on a pathway like this, now they've got that experience, and by the time they get that training, we'll know a little more what needs to be included if you're looking for that specialized track. We see it as a really good opportunity, especially for these kids that are leaving the academy program at JCPS. It's very easy for them to hit a barrier and get disconnected from their path of where they intended to go. And so this is really that opportunity to have someone to guide them and put

IODERATOR: How are employers fundng these things? It does seem to be an stment that they need to make in siness. So what are some ways that they're making the funding work?

COBB: You're 100 percent right there. It's definitely an investment, a long-term investment. The State of Kentucky has a lot of really nice funding programs to help support an employer's investment. One of those is what's called KCTCS TRAINS. It's a grant process that goes through the community and technical college system in Kentucky. And it can pay for up to 75 percent of the employer cost, so a great investment. We recognize that there's a cost help support employers with that, so TRAINS pay up to 75 percent. We also have Bluegrass State Skills, which is another bucket of money. And we're just seeing continual investment in apprenticeship. We see these requests for grant applications almost weekly.

WOOD: I think employers realize that whatever money they're putting into it, the ROI of what they get out of that employee is so worth it. It's not a money question. It's more of how do I just get it done? How do I train them up? Because the cost to develop these employees ing a whole new workforce and starting over with all of these candidates. We're very excited about the TRAINS funding, as well, which could help to offset expenses incurred.

BAILEY: I'm applauding you over here, Rebec-

training programs. So we had to look at this when you can find funding avenues through grants or other programs, that's amazing. But launching a Career Acceleration Network in the employer needs to work it into their budget and make it a priority, because you're right, the ROI is off the charts when you compare it to the lost money tied to a poorly trained employee or the inability to retain an employee. I just think you make it a priority, and make it a certain percentage of your budget and you just

everybody, but I think as employers we have to | it changes your performance conversations, have skin in the game, and what we're asking of the workforce is for them to come willing and ready to learn. There's tremendous opportunity there for them if they meet that criteria.

WOOD: I think it's important for employers to also realize how critical it is to weigh your staff development and the company culture. When something. For the remote worker, and this Covid hit there was this immediate question of, "How do I cope? What do I pull back on to really hard to measure the productivity, right? ployee agrees to stay in that position for 3-6 WESTBROOK: Unfortunately, as employers make sure I survive?" One of the first things Because a lot of managers and leaders still perwe can't always count on the grant. That's that we turned the spigot back on was our professional development for employees. I highly





trainees, of the trainers, the training materials, the space, the equipment. And there's no guarantees. Trainees might not learn quickly enough; they might not stay, not only with the employer, they might not even stay in the industry. But the risk of not attempting to grow our future workforce to build that pipeline and the opportunity costs associated with that are there, but a great investment. And we want to too great. So the choice of inaction really is not an option. I think that employers have to funding is one really great resource that will have it be part of our budget. But we're trying to measure those returns., it's early in the process, but some of the things that we're seeing, not only in skill development, is also it adds to our already strong culture because we're willing to train folks. It adds to our retentior Turnover in construction is historically high and ours is extremely low. And we see great value in that because there's cost associated with turnover. Beyond this entry-level training with apprenticeship program, we have developed career ladders and training where people can go from being unskilled to skilled and then is way less expensive than going and recruit- | to be a lead person and then to be a foreman in training, and then a foreman and superintendent in training, and up to project manager. Someone who maybe never went to college or got a degree has the opportunity to very quickly get into a management-level position, and they don't have to take on the pitfalls of ca. I mean, 100 percent you're correct. I think | student debt. It's a different option. It's not for | It was something that we just didn't have. And | ing people working around this issue.

it's expensive. it's the time and wages of the encourage employers if they have not done it, put it back. Because right now, more than ever your employees are questioning, "How am I going to grow in this organization? It's not like I can see this easy way to get to where I want to go now. Or does my organization still care about me the same way?" That is just a no-brainer for us. We thought, we have to put it back because our employees were really interested. And this was a really good time for them to take advantage of training. With this flexible work environment, and they didn't have to travel three states over to get access to some of these things. I think it's so important for every employer out there to make sure that they are doing this for their employees.

> COBB: And I think having that defined pathway that Jonathan sort of mapped out with what they're doing from A to Z, is really going to help them retain their employees, and it sounds like your retention rate is higher and turnover is lower because of that. Having that pathway is so important.

> WOOD: We did not have career pathways. I built them for GLI for every employee last year. It was very eye-opening for me. You think oh, I can knock this out in a couple weeks. No, you can't. I kept calling one of our HR partners and they were like, no this is six months plus.

your review conversations. It changed how employees felt about the organization because they saw this ladder that wasn't there before. And so we've seen a big shift in our employee engagement

BAILEY: You know, Rebecca, you touched on even for the remote worker pre-pandemic, it's ceive your productivity and your engagement and your job success by your presence and proximity. That goes away when you're working remotely. So it's really important that you have some other means of recognizing what someone is contributing to the organization.

IODERATOR: Is there anything that we dn't talk about today that you think is portant for Business First readers to w about workforce development?

COBB: I just want to make sure that our employer partners know that the community and technical college is here to support them. We want to help them grow their talent pipeline. We're flexible, creative, and can definitely build a custom solution for them, as needed.

WOOD: By the time this comes to print, we will have launched the Greater Louisville Racial Equity Pledge and we will be getting ready to launch a toolkit to help employers with "How do I build my internal DE&I policy; How do I include some more hiring of diverse vendors?" And so really knowing that there's going to be that collaborative resource for companies that are going to feel very overwhelmed by this, I think is something that we would want to make sure that as many businesses know about as possible.

BAILEY: I would say it's never been a more critical time to be connected. To be connected to your workforce, your employees, the workforce that are not your employees who you wish were, and to be connected to the community and your resources. Just as Nickie mentioned, provide resources and be creative, we are doing the same at Hanna Resource Group. But it's not just us. There are lots of great resources and partners. Jonathan mentioned a few. So really leveraging those resources and focusing on doing what you need to do for your business and not being closed off to being creative and being open.

WESTBROOK: I think a lot of these challenges are evergreen challenges. They've been here before. They might have evolved and look a little different now, and they're going to be here a while and probably evolve again as we have a lot of aging workforce that's going to be leaving us. There's going to be even more positions to backfill. We've got a lot of knowledge and experience that will be retiring from the industry soon and that's not unique to us. We employers have to accept that as a long-term challenge. We have to be willing to meet that challenge with energy and innovation and we can't do it alone. We have to partner. And so the point that Angie makes about connection is so important.

Two of the people we've connected with are on this call with JCTC, with GLI. There's others. We partner with peers in our industry. We partner with peers that are geographically in other places. The winners at the end of the day are going to be the folks willing to innovate, willing to invest, willing to take some risk and do things a little bit differently. I think that our community stands to benefit from that; our employers stand to benefit from that; and our workforce stands to benefit from that. So I'm really excited about what the future is because we have so many intelligent hardwork-