

## **Apprenticeship is Just the Beginning**

**The Trump administration's continued and publicly stated emphasis on bringing** manufacturing jobs back to the United States, has led to an executive order, signed by the President earlier this summer, that seeks to expand apprenticeships throughout various industries, including health care, IT and manufacturing.

When it comes to apprentice programs, Germany is generally considered the gold standard and is often used as a model by other countries hoping for solutions to jobless rates for young adults, as Rose Jacobs notes in her April 21 *Financial Times* **article**, [“Germany’s apprenticeship scheme success may be hard to replicate.”](#) Nearly 60 percent of the **country’s recent high school graduates in Germany opt for these three-year** apprenticeship programs - which typically mix on-the-job and in-school training - over college.

**But, as Jacobs points out, Germany’s work-study model** is a long-standing one and therefore a more accepted concept. So, the stigma often attached to vocational training in our country - that it is a solution for less academically successful students - is not prevalent in **Germany. Jacobs says that is a primary reason Germany’s model might not be as successful** in other countries.

In Germany, most positions - **“from electricians to nursery-school teachers”** - require some level of **standardized training and certification**. **“If apprenticeships are only a system for lower achievers, I’d guess they will not work,”** Professor Heike Solga, director of the skill formation and labor markets research unit at the WZB Berlin Social Science Center, was **quoted as saying in Jacobs’ article**.

Although vocational training is often seen in the U.S. as an alternative for students who **can’t or don’t want to follow the more “traditional” four-year** college path, there are companies across the country that have instituted successful apprentice programs, especially in the manufacturing and building trades. For example, the Siemens Energy gas production plant in Charlotte, North Carolina provides four years of on-the-job training with an associate [degree in mechatronics](#) from nearby Central Piedmont Community College. When they finish, graduates have no [student loans](#) and enter the workforce earning more **than \$50,000 a year. (Jeffrey J. Selingo, “Wanted: Factory Workers, Degree Required,”** *New York Times*, Jan. 30, 2017).

Good-paying manufacturing jobs like those through Siemens are in line with what the Trump administration has stated a commitment to bringing. But in a [June 18 piece for the Wall](#)

[\*Street Journal\*](#), Eric Hanushek wrote that “adapting this German system for the U.S. is little more than a dream.”

Why would this be the case? In addition to the hurdles of changing the preconceived notions about vocational training, American workers - even those who are well-trained - more easily run the risk of becoming replaceable, Hanushek argues. To be sure, graduates of German apprenticeships face this, too. They enter their jobs with high-quality skills, but often **become obsolete as industries change. But Germany’s strong unions can provide solace and protection**, even to workers with outdated skill sets. Conversely, U.S. companies tend to be more willing to continuously replace employees who have not kept up with advancing technology.

**So, what is the solution? Hanushek says it’s “lifelong learning.”**

Lifelong learning - specifically continuous training, ongoing education and adaptive techniques for workers in industries with rapidly evolving technologies - requires learning agility, which involves embracing and remembering new experiences, according to Dr. Warner Burke, professor at Teachers College Columbia University and creator of the *Burke Learning Agility Inventory*<sup>®</sup> (*Burke LAI*<sup>®</sup>).

**“Agile learning means dealing with new experiences flexibly and rapidly by trying new behavior, getting feedback and making quick adjustments so new learning will be realized,”** Burke says.

As the exclusive partner with Burke, E·A·S·I·Consult<sup>®</sup> has already incorporated the *Burke LAI* into various efforts to identify and develop leaders. This approach has allowed us to provide a more comprehensive and accurate assessment and development effort.

Most recently, a process **was designed for identifying, and then developing, “individual contributors” possessing the level of learning agility required for top success in today’s - and tomorrow’s** - ever-changing industries. This process is the foundation of what Hanushek referred to as **“lifelong learning.”**

Recent research pinpoints the need for well-developed learning agility in order to successfully learn over the years. So, by incorporating learning agility development into various apprentice programs, the U.S. may finally see the full advantage of vocational training. Overall, as the global marketplace continues to change at a fast rate, learning agility will become more critical than ever before.

## About the Author

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