

Career Changers to Teachers: An Investment

Why would a corporation invest in losing a good employee to a teaching career? This is a question that arises whenever I talk about career changers.

The answer to this question is twofold.

First, it's all about the future. This country is in need of STEM teachers, teachers who have a deep knowledge of the subjects they teach. President Obama has included this need for STEM teachers in the 2015 budget and made it a priority to prepare 100,000 STEM teachers. Where better to find individuals who come with a background of rich experiences in the field than in STEM corporations? These are employees who have worked in the field, can talk about how knowledge is applied, and provide examples to students who question the need to learn information. These employees may be near retirees who have worked for 25 years, are able to retire, but now want to give back to their communities. Or they may be younger employees who have volunteered in the schools and have found they love sharing their knowledge and want to do more to grow a future work force. Corporate investment of time, information, and funding can make a difference in the future number of STEM teachers and proficient students; this, in turn, leads to a future pool of available applicants for STEM companies. A corporation can inform employees of available teacher certification programs and their differences, support career changers while they take teacher education courses, and assist them as they move into the classrooms as either student teachers or as teachers of record with mentors. Employees who leave to teach today can grow a future of knowledgeable and innovative employees tomorrow.

Second, it's all about the present. A corporation needs to look not only to the future for benefits but also to the present for profits. "Corporate teachers" provide positive relationships with the communities in which they work. STEM employees who become teachers communicate positive and accurate information about the corporation where they have worked. Students as well as other teachers enjoy hearing stories about the workplace. Teachers share lesson plans and want to know how the information was used on the job. One environmental science teacher was introduced to an environmental scientist. The teacher explained that she was working on water testing with her students. Immediately, the career changer began discussing the work she had done testing water in different areas of the state, and together they planned how the students would learn and use this new information in field trips as well as how the career changer would share the information about her job in the classroom. Students enjoy hearing about these experiences and learn about future work opportunities. One chemist was visiting a classroom and when students who were executing a lab assignment found out that he was an active chemist, they wanted to know all about where he worked, what he did, and how he would use the information they were learning. These students take this information home to share with parents and other family who are thankful for these real-life opportunities in the schools. Touching and influencing a child is an effective method of marketing.

The need for STEM teachers is national. Teachers who not only understand the material but also have experience with the knowledge they are imparting will help their students have a deep knowledge and understanding of the material. In addition, by being effective teachers, these career changer teachers market the companies for which they have worked. For information about teaching as a second career and the different programs available, contact Sheila Allen at the Center for Career Changers to the Classroom at sheila@ccteach.org.