

4 things every learnership should provide

Learnerships, designed to address youth unemployment, close the skills gap and drive employment equity in South Africa, have to deliver more than an NQF registered qualification. The 12-month work-based learning programmes, directly linked to an occupation or field of work, need to produce graduates who not only have the knowledge, skills and ability to perform a specific occupation, but they must also be ready for the world of work. If work readiness is not incorporated into learnerships, the reality is that learners will struggle to find work when they graduate.



Sean Sharp, executive head of sales for EduPower Skills Academy

This is the opinion of Sean Sharp, the executive head of sales for EduPower Skills Academy. He believes that companies sponsoring unemployed candidates for learnerships and bursaries for skills development points on their B-BBEE scorecards, need to put pressure on training providers to go above and beyond the curriculum. By making work readiness an integral part of their programme, they will also be ensuring that their learners are set up for success in the job market.

“A qualification – whether it’s Grade 12, a certificate, diploma or a degree – will not guarantee that a learner is employable. Employers want to hire people who are work-ready, and who can step into a role and perform from day one. It is, therefore, our job as training providers to ensure our learners are proficient in these essential skills,” says Sharp.

Work readiness is a combination of attributes and behaviours that ensure prospective candidates have the skills, critical thinking and ability required to perform and retain their jobs. To develop these skills amongst learners, Sharp advises companies to ask their training providers if these four steps are included in their learnerships:

1. 900 hours of work experience

Every learnership programme is designed to comprise 30% theoretical training and 70% work experience. This means that learners should graduate with a minimum of 900 hours of practical on-the-job experience in a specific occupation – not only preparing them for work but giving them the skills and experience they need to perform effectively in an entry-level position.

2. Soft skills development

Work experience provides learners with the opportunity to work together and learn from each other, giving them a better understanding of the job on hand. It imparts practical, on-the-job ability training such as effective

communication, presentation skills, email and telephone etiquette and even conflict management - skills they can practice and perfect in preparation for a real-work environment.

3. Understanding the rules

The world of work is daunting as there are so many unwritten rules that employers often take for granted that a new employee knows and understands. Your training provider should, therefore, be operating in the same way as a business and learners need to be following the discipline of working a five-day week, being punctual, adhering to leave practices as well as completing tasks accurately and timeously. By doing this, they are giving the learner a meaningful introduction to the world of work.

4. Coaching and mentoring

Some learners adjust quickly to a new environment while others take more time and may even need help adjusting. This is where coaching and mentoring are highly effective tools to ensure that young people have the support they need to achieve their full potential. A simple intervention such as an hour with an experienced mentor can make a world of difference for someone who is battling to understand what is required of them in the workplace.

“When learners understand the theory of the learnership and are competent in putting it into practice, it boosts their confidence making them positive contributors, more productive, good motivators and excellent role models. This results in a great attitude that will not only help them find their first job but will set them up for future career success,” says Sharp.

“Learnerships require considerable financial investment on the part of the sponsor company,” he continues. “It is, therefore, important that the training provider selected is doing everything possible to ensure that your learners are equipped with all the requisite resources to thrive in a work environment”.

Through your investment in learnerships, your company has the ability to empower employability. By ensuring that work readiness is a part of every learnership programme, you will be providing graduates with a fighting chance at employment that will positively impact our economy and our future.