
An Old Concept Makes a New Revival – From Apprenticeships to an Incubator for Talent

Some of today's most innovative companies emerge from a void in the market. An unresolved business challenge and/or problem that is frequently quite obvious, but typically it's only a few that possess the entrepreneurial instincts to clearly see the issue as an opportunity - finding an innovative way to solve the issue. CultureFit had an opportunity to interview one such entrepreneur, Jon Schickedanz, the founder of Alliance Labs. In 2014 he saw an opportunity to resolve the cavernous programming/developer talent gap, which benchmarks at around 40% according to [Small Business Trends](#) vs. the number of positions that remain vacant for months due to the gap. But he also had a firsthand perspective that the gap was having a dueling economic impact - true to "supply and demand" economics, the talent void was driving up the acquisition costs of retaining the highly valued skill sets for the small business. The talent void

had become a two-pronged issue for most businesses. For Schickedanz, the answer was baked in a segment of the unemployed who lacked the skill sets but possessed a genuine desire to either gain enough experience to get noticed or learn a completely new trade to become relevant to hiring businesses. He launched Alliance Labs in late 2014 as a "Teaching Agency" - think of an incubator or apprenticeship designed to develop professional skills, with an altruistic twist – we'll train you, but in return, we want you to pay it forward with your peers. Certainly, an innovative, and feel good concept, but Schickedanz was quick to explain, "the concept is what fuels the passion of his core team, but like any new business he's had to make some shifts to the business model in order to make it both profitable as well as deliver against the combined economic need."

Where There's a Will, There's an Answer

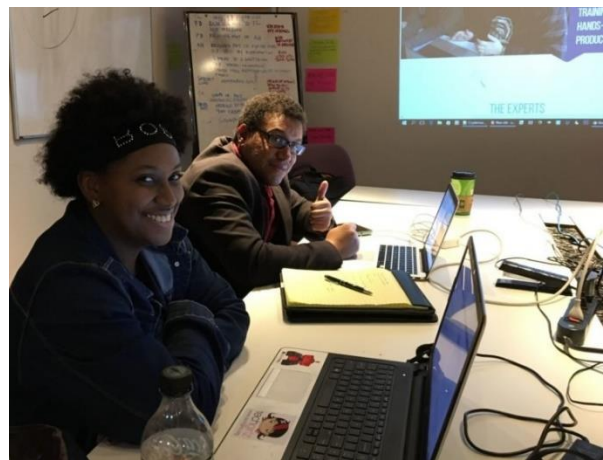
For Schickedanz, the conceptual solution was very straight forward. He explained “the real challenge was finding the perfect balance to support this aspiring group with the appropriate level of training, with the necessary seasoned talent to train, and the clients who are willing to take a chance in exchange for a great product at a fair price – that took some adjustment time.” The solution: Alliance currently takes on 6-8 part-time candidates three times a year. They must complete an accelerated 8 week [crash course](#), and then they're mentored by a stable of experienced and skilled people who are responsible for training – the goal is always the same, placing the candidates on the front line as quickly as possible for the more



straightforward projects, while the Technical director/Lead mentor provides quality control, but also takes on the more complex projects while the candidates shadow. As candidates progress, they are administered a skills test at pre-defined milestones to ensure they're able to meet or exceed expectations when they move to a more permanent position outside of Alliance. The retention rate for Alliance is purposely low, but permanent placements are impressive.

Success is in the Numbers

Alliance currently has a success rate of approximately 80% who have completed the program, nearly 40 people. The program is completely voluntary, with a nominal request that candidate participants give back as few as 5-10 hours per month. What makes this program truly unique, they aren't asked to do this without being compensated, to the contrary, their pay starts at \$15/hour, with a progressive rate increase as their skill sets continue to advance. Once a candidate has



acquired the skills that enable them to teach one- 30-minute class, they get a bump to \$20 per

hour. After 6 months of consistently good work they earn a rate increase to \$25. Schickedanz stated “the compensation is a critical and motivating component to everyone’s success, it’s the primary reason we didn’t set the company as a not-for-profit, because everyone who’s willing to contribute the time and effort, has a right to earn a living wage. We also believe it’s a big reason why we have so many of the candidates complete the program.”

A Win, Win Model that Scales

Schickedanz’s vision is only half complete, by providing a gateway career opportunity for those that want and/or need to learn new skills in order to make a living wage. The next phase for Alliance is to deploy a similar model to provide similar opportunities for special needs adults with Autism or spectrum disorders. The primary difference – programs will be offered on-line, allowing people who are unable to make it into the city to participate.

The Alliance Lab mission succeeds on two critical fronts – 1) training development to

Although the program is still building momentum, it’s the placements of these recruits which are most notable, including branded enterprises such as All State, ThoughtWorks, Google, to name only a few. One graduate recently accepted a position for the city of Mobile, Alabama to lead their IT department, and yet another graduate is paying it forward by teaching these skills for the less fortunate at a local library.

those that need a little extra help – not charity, but compensation at a discounted rate in return for skilled experience, and 2) providing a valuable, flexible resource for new business start-ups who need to keep expenses down. As Schickedanz’s added, “It’s a bit of a head scratcher why companies such as Google, Amazon, Microsoft don’t offer a similar program. But for the Alliance team, what we do is so much more than a job, it’s an opportunity to make a real difference for people who aren’t looking for sympathy, but a real opportunity to contribute to something meaningful.”

About Alliance Labs



By partnering with [The Alliance Labs](#), you do more than just join in the task of building a website. You are contributing to a story of transformation.

Year after year of working in digital media production, we saw ambitious and focused young adults overcome great economic adversity by graduating from web development and digital communications training programs. Yet they still struggled to find employment putting their newfound knowledge to practical use.

At the same time, we've seen the need for comprehensive digital services grow substantially, and the demand for skilled, creative tech talent has grown in kind.

The Alliance Labs serves both challenges as a "Teaching Agency." Our mission is to employ and develop emerging technical-creative talent. Our leadership team, with 50+ years of digital production experience, guides and mentors that talent to produce high-value digital content for our partners and clients. Through the work, and with continuous technical training and professional development, our residents create the opportunity to ready themselves for a long and fulfilling career as creative professionals, forging a new future for themselves, their families and community.

About CultureFit



CultureFit Technology Staffing has over 20 years of local, IT Recruiting experience and is entrusted to hire permanent and contract employees in Greater Chicagoland and nationwide. Each year, they're charged to recruit, negotiate, and place 100's of open positions with quality talent that meet skill set requirements as well as compliment an organization's culture. Their unique position has afforded them the opportunity to identify hiring trends from both the organization and the talent's perspective.

