



Talent Pipeline Management with Jaimie Francis

Leading Learning Podcast Transcript for Episode 313

Jaimie Francis: [00:00:00] So much of this, it comes down to communication, as is often the case with a lot of the challenges that we experience in workforce is it comes down to communication. So how can we really effectively listen to one another so that the solutions that we're coming up with together are ones that really will attack the problem at hand?

Celisa Steele: [00:00:22] I'm Celisa Steele.

Jeff Cobb: [00:00:24] I'm Jeff Cobb, and this is the Leading Learning Podcast. Welcome to episode 313, which features a conversation with Jaimie Francis. Jaimie is vice president of policy and programs at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation's Center for Education and Workforce, the nonprofit affiliate of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce dedicated to strengthening the nation's educational standards and the quality of its workforce. Jaimie and Celisa talk about the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation's Talent Pipeline Management initiative specifically, as well as workforce development in general and how to effectively and meaningfully involve employers. Jaimie and Celisa spoke in May 2022.

Celisa Steele: [00:01:17] And so tell us a bit about the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation's Center for Education and Workforce, the work that it does, and maybe a bit more about your role there.

Jaimie Francis: [00:01:28] Absolutely. So the U.S. Chamber Foundation's Center for Education and Workforce is a nonprofit affiliate of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the largest business lobbying organization in the country, representing businesses large and small and an amazing federation of state and local chambers. And, as the nonprofit side of the house, we have an opportunity to work with business communities all across the country and in some cases across the world to think about how they engage meaningfully in education and workforce training issues. So businesses tend to be a very trusted voice within communities, and often they don't always find themselves to be equipped with the tools and the resources that they need in order

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to best understand how can they engage? How can they really make a difference in their communities? So we look at that from the lens of providing them with research and with resources, toolkits, ways to kind of identify business community members, opportunities to make real, meaningful change. So what that looks like can vary in terms of one business that may be more particularly invested in early childhood education and early childhood care versus others that are really interested in career technical education or work-based learning experiences or those that are thinking about how they can more meaningfully upskill and reskill their existing workforce.

Jaimie Francis: [00:02:47] So it looks a little bit different from community to community, but our center focuses on everything from early childcare and education through workforce training, so the entire education and workforce spectrum. My role in particular focuses more so on the latter end of that talent pipeline. Thinking from a workforce training perspective how is it that we can work with the business community so that they can be more effective communicators of what their job needs are and how they relay those important messages to education and training partners as well as potential and existing employees. We know that there's a massive skills gap out there. So through our Talent Pipeline Management initiative, we've had an opportunity to work with partners all across the country and even as far north as Canada to think through how employers can be more engaged and more effective leaders in organizing and managing their talent supply chains. So I enjoy this work immensely and have been doing it now for a little over five years in which I've gotten to oversee and lead our Talent Pipeline Management National Learning Network, anybody who goes through an academy experience in which we teach this TPM framework that I'm excited to talk to you about today.

Celisa Steele: [00:04:02] I definitely do want to talk more about TPM and the related work that you're doing around that initiative. But I'm thinking, before we go too much farther, that we should maybe just pause and talk about this key term because I feel like it's behind so much of what you do and probably what we're going to talk about, and that term is *workforce development*. So how do you define or explain workforce development?

Jaimie Francis: [00:04:28] I think of workforce development the same way as I think about learning is that it's just continual. It's constant. We're all getting new skills every second of every day. At least that's the hope. So from the context of the work that we do, I think about workforce development is just ongoing learning to help you do your both your current job as well as a potential future job better and better and trying to leverage new technologies or new trainings or new learning experiences that will help you develop for whatever your job is going to be in the future, as well as whatever it is that you're doing now. So I think it's a bit of an

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amorphous term and that it's probably going to change for each individual for what it looks like in the context of one industry over another. But just that continual learning.

Celisa Steele: [00:05:20] Well, I like that perspective that it is this continual endeavor that goes on and that it's also customized or personalized based on who the individual is, that workforce development might look different for each person. Now, you've mentioned the Talent Pipeline Management initiative, so let's go ahead and talk about that now. Maybe tell us a little bit about when and how and why it got started.

Jaimie Francis: [00:05:45] Absolutely. So we credit our colleague Jason Tyszko, who came to the Chamber Foundation in 2013, and, during his job interview, he talked with us about this concept of taking supply chain management principles—something that many businesses are very familiar with; it's how they run their organizations; it's how they think about the importance of their communication to their suppliers—and he posed this question to us to say, “What if you were to apply that to your talent?” Think of how meaningful that would be and how much more effective employers could be in their education and training partnerships if they were to apply those same kind of rules for themselves in terms of how they communicate what their needs are in terms of their most critical jobs to their education and training partners. And it rested on this idea of employer collaboration, saying, if you got a group of employers to come together and to determine their most critical job needs and think through what do projections look like for those jobs with their own business assumptions baked in? Because a lot of times we base job projections on state labor market information or projections that come out of the Bureau of Labor Statistics. But it's based on a lot of assumptions and definitions and generalizations that are determined by people that fall outside of the business community rather than the employers themselves.

Jaimie Francis: [00:07:10] So TPM was really this idea to say, you know, we have a lot of people without jobs, and we have a lot of jobs without people. Employers are a key ingredient in solving for those gaps. So what is it that we need to do to help employers get more organized and become more engaged leaders of this process? And TPM, using these supply chain management principles, was just this really nice step-by-step guidebook for the employer community of tools for their toolkit to say, “Hey, we need you all in the driver's seat of these conversations. And right now you're invited to the party, but you're not the hosts, and we need you to host the party in this sense.” So the framework really started to develop more as a theory of here's some ideas, but, luckily for us, we had a group of folks back in 2015 who, after we put out an initial white paper on the theory of TPM, said, “We're willing to put this to the test.” So we were able to get seven business-facing organizations to test the theory and put it into action.

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And, through that, we were able to develop a six-strategy framework that was more fleshed out in terms of here's what this kind of concept could look like in practice of getting employers to organize, having them go through this series of job projections and data collection so that they better understood what their needs are.

Jaimie Francis: [00:08:40] We call it the “doing their homework” stage of identifying what are the most critical skills for these jobs. Once we have an understanding is there some shared language that we can identify as a group of employers as to what our needs are for these jobs? And where does our talent currently come from? Are there untapped sources of talent that we could go to in the case that we're not able to meet our demand? And then how are we going to work with those education and training partners most effectively so that we design talent solutions together rather than continue to point fingers at one another and play the blame game for “You're the reason that I don't have the people that I need,” and, from the educator community, “Well, you haven't given me the exact information that I need in order to put together programs that will serve those needs.” So this framework has now been tested by partners all across the country over the past several years, and we've continued to make improvements to the framework because of their firsthand experiences implementing in their respective communities.

Celisa Steele: [00:09:43] And so you said over the past several years you've been implementing it and making changes. So about how old is the initiative?

Jaimie Francis: [00:09:51] Yeah. So the original white paper was released in 2014, and we were able to have a pilot take place over the course of about a year and a half starting in 2015. And, from that pilot experience, we heard from our pilot folks was you need a lot more people like us doing this because this is a dramatically different approach to workforce than what we've seen in the past, just in terms of that employer leadership and that focus on employer return on investment. So, based on their feedback, we started an academy to teach the framework starting in 2016. So the Academy has been running now for about six years in which we've been able to bring more TPM family members to the party to test out the framework in their communities.

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Celisa Steele: [00:11:07] So you're a faculty member, at least as I understand it, and I get the impression that really the Academy is about teaching the six-strategy framework, but maybe just tell us a little bit more about how that works, the Academy piece.

Jaimie Francis: [00:11:22] Absolutely. So we get people from many different kind of stakeholder groups that are interested in learning about Talent Pipeline Management and what role they might play in it. And, when the Academy initially started, it was really going back to the business community that we've worked with at the Chamber Foundation for so long because of our affiliation with the U.S. Chamber. So we had a lot of local chambers of commerce and state chambers of commerce, industry associations, and economic development organizations that would participate in the Academy to learn the TPM framework. And many of them have existing public-private partnerships in their communities in which they have all the critical stakeholders at the table—the business community, the education and training community, the nonprofit communities, sometimes local or state government. And, again, what we saw was a missing piece or a critical element was that employers were often contributing to these conversations but more so as ancillary voices versus really leading the conversation. And what the Academy teaches—this is in addition to the framework, the TPM framework—it really teaches what are those key facilitation questions that we need to be asking ourselves if we're really going to have employers guide this process of better organizing their information to then relay that information to education and training partners. Not because we feel like it's necessary for employers to be doing things behind closed doors. TPM is certainly not an employer-led or, excuse me, it's not an employer-alone.

Jaimie Francis: [00:12:56] It's a team sport. It's meant to be all folks working together. But we find that, if you give employers this opportunity to meet with like-minded employers from their community, then there's a real opportunity for them to come out much clearer communicators in which they will eventually bring those education and training partners to the table. But we like for the employers to get their facts straight first. So the Academy is one in which we get to teach this framework. And then the idea is that those folks would then go back to their communities and start to implement the TPM framework, so start to bring together groups of employers and walk them through the TPM process that's made up of those six strategies. So this is something that the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation has done for the past several years, either hosting at our offices in Washington, D.C., or sometimes we get to go out to states and do state-based academies. So, for instance, we went to the state of Michigan. We've actually done three academies for the state of Michigan. We've gone out to Kentucky, to California, all across the country, and then, of course, have been doing them virtually as a result of the

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pandemic. So we've got lots of different ways that folks can access the learnings of the TPM Academy and the TPM framework.

Celisa Steele: [00:14:16] I was going to ask about whether virtual was an option, which you just covered that, that because of the pandemic, you do have the virtual offering now. What does that Academy look like? Like how long does that typically run? Is there a set timeframe for folks starting and then finishing it?

Jaimie Francis: [00:14:33] Yeah, absolutely. What we found and what we've heard from partners is that—we constantly learn in TPM, so we try to really integrate learnings from our partners and our practitioners—and what they've told us is that learning the TPM framework is like drinking from a fire hose. So we found that it's best to pace out the learnings. And, as I mentioned, the framework is made up of six strategies. So what we do, over the course of between about four to five months, is we will meet with those going through the Academy, usually two days at a time in which we'll teach them a strategy or perhaps two strategies, and then they'll digest the information, maybe start to implement those strategies, and then they'll come back to us for their next training. So that way they're able to take it one step at a time, and we try to make it as congruous as possible to how it might actually be implemented in their communities, in terms of recognizing that there's usually a lot to be done at the beginning of this process of starting to have one-on-one conversations with employers and with other partners to familiarize them with the framework, so let's give them the time to do that and then bring them back for continual learning. So it's usually over the course of about four to five months, but, even once they conclude their Academy experience, they're then a part of our National Learning Network in which we continue to offer them technical assistance and support so that we're learning every step of the way with them.

Celisa Steele: [00:15:59] Tell me more about who shows up at the Academy and how they're identified, those students who are coming in and learning these strategies, taking them back into their organizations. How do you identify those folks, and maybe what are some typical job roles, job titles that they hold?

Jaimie Francis: [00:16:17] Absolutely. There are a lot of different roles of folks who have participated in academies. And, admittedly, it's mostly been spread through word of mouth from the local chamber and the state chamber community and industry associations, economic development organizations. But, over the past, I would say, four years, we've had an increase in interest of folks from the education and training community. So folks from community colleges and four-year institutions and sometimes even from K-12 school districts that are just trying to

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better understand how they can engage with the employer community more effectively. So I would say the majority of participants to date have been from business-facing organizations, so your chambers, your associations, but then increasingly so from that education community. And then we also get a number of folks that are interested in TPM from the context of government. So people from state departments of labor or state departments of commerce in which they're trying to better understand a new approach to engaging employers. Folks from workforce boards have also been interested in the TPM framework and what their role could be in it. So our thought process is that it's helpful for all types of partners to best think through how it is that they might benefit from the framework.

Jaimie Francis: [00:17:35] Folks always want to know what's in it for me, so we're always more than happy to expand our learning cohort so that it includes representation from various stakeholder groups. And then we're always looking to learn from their perspective how is it that we can improve the framework and help all of our partners that are implementing. But, in terms of the exact roles within those organizations, we have some organizations that come to us that they're really the only employee for that particular organization. Within the chamber community, you have some chambers of commerce that are one or two people, whereas you have others that have 30 people on their education team alone. So there's a lot of variety in terms of sometimes it's the president and the CEO or sometimes it's more so somebody who's really focused in on talent and recruitment strategies or someone who's acting as a workforce education liaison between the business community and the education community. So it's looked a little bit different from organization to organization, but, if you're worried about talent challenges and talent strategies, then this might very well be a good training for you.

Celisa Steele: [00:18:41] Well, thanks for explaining who tends to come to the Academy, who tends to be part of it. And you mentioned the National Learning Network of TPM practitioners and partners. And so my understanding is that then folks who complete the Academy can then be part of that National Learning Network. But certainly correct me if I'm wrong, and maybe just explain a little bit about that network and what it does in relationship to the TPM initiative overall.

Jaimie Francis: [00:19:11] Absolutely. And you're right on the money in that as soon as you complete the TPM Academy and really as soon as you enroll in a TPM Academy, you become a part of that National Learning Network. And I would say that that's been a key ingredient for TPM success to date is the continued willingness of folks who have gone through the Academy experience and have returned to their communities and have started to implement the framework, their willingness to continue to lend their expertise and their experiences and be

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vulnerable and talk about the challenges that they've had to deal with while implementing, as well as celebrate the successes that they've had. That is why we've been able to make the changes to the framework and continue to educate other partners as to here are some things that work really well, and here are some things to avoid. We've made countless changes to our curriculum that we use as part of the Academy experience because of those National Learning Network members and their continued engagement with us. So that is now a group that's more than 500 strong. And we bring these people together, not just through their Academy cohorts, but even, in May of this year, we had an opportunity to connect with our National Learning Network through a biannual summit in which we bring all of our partners together and talk through what their implementation has looked like. And we think about it from different contexts. For this particular summit, we focused on those that are interested in using the TPM framework to improve diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts within an industry. We had other folks talk really thoughtfully about their data analysis and what do they do with employer data once it comes in in terms of how that's then shared with a group of employers in a way that protects their individualized information. Those learnings are just so important. And the National Learning Network is an amazing group of people that just continues to get better and better and, luckily for us, willing to share their stories and experiences.

Celisa Steele: [00:21:12] I'm curious—have there been thought of certifying folks who go through the TPM Academy?

Jaimie Francis: [00:21:19] Oh, you are right on it. Are you Nostradamus? Because, yes, we are. We are currently in the process of not only migrating what has traditionally been truly scheduled, determined by U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation staff availability to provide Academy experiences, to an online learning platform which will provide folks the option to take that learning at their own pace. So TPM Co/Lab will be launched in end of 2022, beginning of 2023, and that will include an opportunity for learners to not only take an assessment to verify that they understand the TPM framework and earn a digital badge, but we will also eventually open up the opportunity for partners to submit a portfolio of work and apply for a peer-review process in which they'll be able to get advanced standing and be able to earn their, what we call a TPMP, their Talent Pipeline Management Practitioner badge. So this is truly based on feedback from our network in which they feel as if they've learned something that demonstrates true knowledge and a value add to their communities. So we wanted to be able to answer that call and to provide that opportunity for folks to be able to have their learning and their doing acknowledged in that way.

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Celisa Steele: [00:22:47] So I'm thinking of the typical listeners to the Leading Learning Podcast, and I know that you've really stressed throughout this conversation just employer collaboration and really working with those employers. And so I'm curious to know what advice you have for learning businesses that really want to collaborate effectively with employers. Do you have any tips about what contributes to good collaborations and/or what maybe tends not to work?

Jaimie Francis: [00:23:16] Yes. I think that one of the greatest learning lessons that I've experienced with TPM and listening to our partners based on their firsthand experiences implementing the framework is to make the difference we really have to ask employers what keeps them up at night and allow for that pain point, as we call it in TPM speak, to determine every step from that point on. And what we heard so often is that you can get employers engaged for maybe a couple of months, maybe they're a part of an advisory board, or they are participating in a public-private partnership. But eventually you get waning involvement from them over time. And what we've heard from the employer community, it's "I wasn't getting anything out of it. It wasn't meeting my needs. And I'm pulled in a lot of different directions." One employer might serve on a dozen different advisory boards. If we're allowing for them to define the pain point and really help us understand what success looks like for them, that is what we have found can really lead to that shared value concept that also comes out of supply chain management, which is what TPM is really based on. If we can get employers to identify if it's increasing workforce diversity that's keeping them up at night and allow for them to say, "Well, here's what success could look like for me if I had this many more opportunities to advance people of color in my talent pipelines, here's how I might work towards that." Or "Here's the types of partners that I want to work with in order to achieve those objectives." That's really key to keeping them at the table. And a lot of times partners do want the same things, right? Education and training partners, they want to be able to help their students get good jobs, and they want to be able to tout that they have good job placement opportunities. Nonprofit organizations are interested in helping support the constituencies in which they work with to have career advancement opportunities. So, if we can all take the perspective that we're ultimately all going to get our needs met but really to keep the employers engaged in this process, we want to allow them to lead, then we see that to be just an awesome difference-maker in terms of what we typically see an employer role in those types of relationships. Having employers define that pain point and define what success looks like can be really helpful to all parties involved.

Jaimie Francis: [00:25:56] And, ultimately, we're all aiming for that learner and worker to benefit. From the context of something that doesn't work is I found that employers are not interested in being just completely sold to on a program because a lot of times what that means

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is you are somewhat listening to the problem that I have, but mostly you just want to push your solution on me. And that has not really worked in the past if somebody just comes in with a sales pitch mode. It's really about that accurate diagnosis of the problem at hand so that we're not rushing to a solution in search of a problem versus the other way around. So those are two things that I usually like for folks to keep in mind when they're thinking about engaging the employer community is so much of this, it comes down to communication as is often the case, right? With a lot of the challenges that we experience in workforce is it comes down to communication. So how can we really effectively listen to one another so that the solutions that we're coming up with together are ones that really will attack the problem at hand?

Celisa Steele: [00:27:04] Well, thank you so much for sharing those lessons learned because they do seem like extremely powerful lessons if you can apply them well. And that focus on communication, like you said, it is so often at the source of addressing a particular issue or need. But, boy, it can be hard to have that effective communication. It takes time. It takes energy. It takes trust. All of these things that can make it a bit of a challenge. But it sounds like you have this framework; you have these strategies, you're bringing cohorts together; you're centering the employers; you're just doing a lot to provide a framework in which that communication can happen.

Jaimie Francis: [00:27:44] Yes, I think that there are a lot of great efforts that take place that bring together the right people. You've got the right people at the table, but they continue to have one conversation after another in which they're just missed cues or misalignment or misunderstanding. People talk past one another. So TPM is meant to offer that map in some ways. Here's a process to go by that can help overcome some of those communication challenges that these groups have had in the past.

Celisa Steele: [00:28:17] So we've been focusing specifically on TPM for a little bit now. And I just want to ask a picture, a question about the bigger picture of workforce development. And that's just, in general, what do you see as both the opportunities and the challenges in the workforce development space?

Jaimie Francis: [00:28:37] It's always so easy to start with the challenges first. The opportunities that I—I always aim to be an optimist, and I do think that there are a lot of opportunities and that the situation that so many industries and businesses find themselves in now in terms of this talent shortage crisis is we do need to see it as an opportunity. Finally we're getting employers from so many different industries willing to think through untapped talent pools that they haven't in the past and recognize that diversification of your workforce is not just a nice-to-do.

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It's a must-do. And I think that that's a really exciting opportunity. And I feel that it is a shift from perhaps where a lot of communities were in the past. And so I think that where we try to demonstrate that TPM can be a framework that's used for that opportunity, it's really to identify there are folks that have been off the bench—those impacted by the criminal justice system, opportunity youth, veterans communities. How is it that we can get them connected to the pipeline in a meaningful way and not just because we're in the crisis that we're in right now? How do we think of that as part of our long-term talent strategy so that we're very intentional about it and that it's at the forefront of our efforts versus something that's just on the back burner because we think corporate socially it would make for a positive impact in our community. I think that you can do both and that you can do it strategically and effectively, but you also have to put the time in and make it part of your actual talent strategy. So I see that as just a great opportunity because of the challenge that we're in. But I would hate for, once perhaps there's more of an evening out of unfilled jobs versus people who are looking for jobs, I would hope that that still continues to be something that companies really prioritize.

Jeff Cobb: [00:30:43] Jaimie Francis is vice president of policy and programs at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation's Center for Education and Workforce. You'll find links to learn more about the Talent Pipeline Management initiative and the TPM Academy in the show notes for this episode at leadinglearning.com/episode313. You can also learn more by e-mailing workforce@uschamber.com.

Celisa Steele: [00:31:08] At leadinglearning.com/episode313, you'll also see options for subscribing to the Leading Learning Podcast. Jeff and I would be grateful if you would subscribe if you haven't yet, as subscriptions give us some data on the impact of the podcast.

Jeff Cobb: [00:31:22] We'd also be grateful if you'd rate us on Apple Podcasts, especially if you find the Leading Learning Podcast valuable. Celisa and I personally appreciate reviews and ratings, and they also help the show pop up when people search for content on leading a learning business. Go to leadinglearning.com/apple to leave a rating.

Celisa Steele: [00:31:41] Lastly, please spread the word about Leading Learning. At leadinglearning.com/episode313, there are links to find Leading Learning on Twitter, LinkedIn, and Facebook.

Jeff Cobb: [00:31:51] Thanks again, and see you next time on the Leading Learning Podcast.

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