

Participant Feedback from the Seventeenth McKee Learning Lunch
Talent Development in Chattanooga

March 19, 2019

This learning experience was co-sponsored by the Chattanooga Chamber of Commerce Talent Dividend Initiatives; and the McKee Chair of Excellence in Learning, University of Tennessee at Chattanooga

Introduction

Over the past four decades, Chattanooga has enjoyed an extraordinary transformation, from “the dirtiest city in America” to “The Scenic City.” That transformation has sparked unprecedented growth in virtually all sectors of the city’s economy, which, in turn, has been associated with an equally unprecedented need for the many different areas of expertise to fill the jobs associated with the expansion. This McKee Learning Lunch explored Chattanooga’s need for such talent, as well as what should be done to meet this need.

Molly Blankenship, Vice President of Talent Dividend Initiatives of the Chattanooga Chamber of Commerce, introduced the session by presenting existing conditions in Chattanooga, as well as the challenges that we need to address in facing them. Then, in accordance with the process used at each McKee Learning Lunch, there were three general feedback opportunities, or Assignments 1, 2, and 3. The participants, who are listed at the end of this report, provided their insights and questions about the topic. Their responses are presented below.

Assignment 1

Post-presentation Questions. Following the discussion, participants posed questions about Talent Development. The questions are listed below.

Overarching Talent-development Issues

- What does “talent development” mean?
- What current talent development efforts are under way in Chattanooga?
- How do we motivate individuals to continue to improve their skills over their lifetime? To develop their talents to meet future demands?
- How does Chattanooga develop future talent in order to do what Chattanooga has come to be known for—community participation, visioning, planning, and cooperating?
- What can we do right now—without waiting—that we aren’t doing already?
- What type of healthcare challenges will Chattanooga face in the future? What is being done to prepare for these challenges?

Educational Issues

- How do we make math a “must-know” subject as opposed to a “if-it’s-not-your-thing” subject in education?
- How can we disrupt our current educational system and graduate more students who are workforce-ready?

- How do we engage K–3 grades to make them [critical] parts of contributing to the future of students?
- How can the city of Chattanooga and the Hamilton County School System be of help?
- How does the academic system keep up with advances in technology when they do not move at the same pace?

Preparation for Jobs

- How can training institutions adapt and be responsive to the jobs of the future when we don't know what those jobs will be?
- How do very poor people get access to the new jobs in Chattanooga?
- What capacity do we need to build in order to ensure that everyone in our community is prepared to access opportunity?
- Why isn't every business and organization in our community supporting apprenticeships?
- How do the organizers of the McKee Learning Lunches identify the people to invite to these events? [Later, a participant suggested that leaders of businesses—who could potentially provide opportunities for talent-development—should have taken part in the discussion.]

Assignment 2

Discussion Questions: After the presentation, participants, in groups of four, discussed three assigned questions. Questions and responses are listed below.

Question 1. In terms of talent, what do you see as Chattanooga's and Hamilton County's greatest need(s)?

Educational Considerations

- Focus on students in high-poverty areas
- STEM education
- Assessment of motivational interest

Practical Considerations

- Transportation to work
- Accessible childcare

Positive Examples

- Exemplary role models
- Inspiring resilience and developing learnability
- Early exposure to jobs and career pathways
- Developing skill sets, such as good work habits and staying drug-free

Planning Needs

- Job-cluster data
- Understanding of future talent needs
- Consolidation and focus of efforts across multiple organizations

Question 2. What primary barrier(s) stand in the way of meeting our community's talent-development goals?

- Lack of awareness in the community-at-large
- Lack of awareness among businesses and organizations
- Lack of vocational training
- Lack of partnerships in education
- Uncertainty concerning future jobs
- The attempt to address the issues in a wholesale manner rather than as individual
- Political biases or perspectives

Question 3. What key actions or commitments are needed from Chattanooga and Hamilton County institutions (K–12 education, higher education, employers, nonprofits, government) to overcome these barriers?

- Address the political isolation of the poor.
- Develop community mentoring in urban and rural schools.
- Provide a fully funded quality education for all pre-K children.
- Establish career exposure prior to middle school.
- Ensure that minimum high-school criteria are met, which means addressing the issue early and holding educators and students accountable before 12th grade.
- Break the cycle of inaction in order to pursue post-secondary education.
- Practice diversity in education and in a range of occupations.
- Provide sufficient resources in order to create and maintain high-performing schools.
- Develop strong partnerships between higher education and businesses.

Assignment 3

Post-discussion Question: After the discussion, we asked participants to respond, in writing, to two additional questions. The questions and responses are listed below.

Question 1: What is the most important thing you learned today?

Awareness

- Talent-development is a complex issue.
- There's an energy present. If we could "just do it."
- We see common goals and themes in the over-arching opportunity.
- Businesses and citizens care about the future of Chattanooga.

Solutions

- What a better framework of what talent development in Chattanooga would look like.
- The need for increased partnerships and commitments from all shareholders exists.
- Gaps exist in our community for training in fields like technology, healthcare, and education.

Question 2. What unanswered question(s) are you leaving here with?

- What is the next step?
- How will the community address the existing challenges and when will that happen done?
- How will we help people who are affected by poverty to overcome their barriers and move into this opportunity?
- What five influencing agencies in the county need to become part of this conversation?
- What does it take to have a full-throated commitment to quality public schools?
- How do we develop a unified community strategy that pulls everyone together to execute a plan?
- Could Learning Lunches include individuals who are not predominantly vice presidents and executives?

Participants

We would like to thank the following participants for their interest in and contribution to this McKee Learning Lunch.

Brooke Bates. Graduate Assistant, McKee Chair of Excellence in Learning, College of Health, Education, and Professional Studies; University of Tennessee at Chattanooga.

Molly Blankenship. Vice President, Talent Dividend Initiatives, Chattanooga Chamber of Commerce.

Bengt Carlson. Experiential Learning Coordinator, University of Tennessee at Chattanooga.

Eleanor Cooper. Community visioning and engagement strategist.

Peter T. Cooper. Retired. Former President, Community Foundation of Greater Chattanooga.

Terry Davis. President and Manager, St. Andrew's Center Board.

Bo Drake. Vice President, Economic and Workforce Development, Chattanooga State Community College.

Stephen Dunn. Regional Projects Manager, Tennessee Workforce Development.

Terry G. Frederiksen. Director of Development, College of Health, Education, and Professional Studies, University of Tennessee at Chattanooga.

Angie Hargis. Owner, Red Bank Family Diner.

Michael N. Harrell. Owner, Latitude Advisors, LLC.

Bill Hullander. Trustee, Hamilton County.

Ginger Mathis. Associate Vice President, Georgia Northwest Technical College.

Sarah Morgan. President, Benwood Foundation.

Strat Parrott. Principal and Chief Creative Strategist, The Juncture.

Valerie Rutledge. Dean, College of Health, Education, and Professional Studies; University of Tennessee at Chattanooga.

John Schaerer. Director, Chattanooga Regional Talent Dividend Initiative.

Elaine Swafford. CEO, Chattanooga Girls Leadership Academy.

James Tucker. McKee Chair of Excellence in Learning; University of Tennessee at Chattanooga.

Priscilla Tucker. Educational writer, editor, and consultant.