

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

You're listening to Work In Progress. I'm Ramona Schindelheim Editor In Chief of Working Nation. Work In Progress explores the rapidly changing workplace through conversations with innovators, educators, and decision-makers, people with solutions to today's workforce challenges. Joining me this week on the podcast is Maureen Lonergan, Director Of Training and Certification for Amazon Web Services. Marine welcome to the podcast.

Maureen Lonergan, Amazon Web Services director of training and certification:

Thank you for having me.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

I want to start by just kind of laying out what Amazon Web Services is, because I think people know Amazon online. They may not know Amazon is back there making the cloud work for everybody.

Maureen Lonergan, Amazon Web Services director of training and certification:

Yeah. AWS is the world's most comprehensive and broadly adopted cloud platform with more than 200 fully-featured services.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

What kind of jobs come with that? What kind of skills do people need to work on a cloud?

Maureen Lonergan, Amazon Web Services director of training and certification:

You know, it's really interesting. And I've been in tech training for 30 years and at AWS what we're seeing is it's not just technical skills. So, at the core you want to have solution architects and developers and dev ops folks on the team well-skilled in AWS, but we're also seeing business leaders and line of business owners really be interested in how does the cloud apply to them. And so we're seeing a lot of our foundational level content like cloud practitioner being consumed by line of business owners and executives of companies.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

Does Amazon web services provide the cloud computing for big and small companies?

Maureen Lonergan, Amazon Web Services director of training and certification:

Yes. It could go down to an individual.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

Okay. So if I had a small flower shop, I may be using it as well as in the background. So your job is to help people train to become cloud computer experts.

Maureen Lonergan, Amazon Web Services director of training and certification:

Yes, that's my job. I've been with AWS for a little over nine years and actually started the training and certification organization at AWS. And during that time, we've really worked to build a curriculum and hands-on programs for our customers and their employees and train them.

Maureen Lonergan, Amazon Web Services director of training and certification:

So, like I said, solution architects, developers, DevOps, database, administrators, anyone with tech skills. And right now technology is changing so fast and companies are moving to the cloud at a rapid rate. And so a lot of time we're spending is modernizing people's skill sets. So people that were traditional database administrators or storage administrators, we're training them on how to operate in the cloud environment.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

And so you started this in 2012-

Maureen Lonergan, Amazon Web Services director of training and certification:

Yes.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

This upskilling program. How does that work? Are you doing it online? Are you partnering with people? Give me kind of the basics before we go into a little bit more of your goals for the next couple of years.

Maureen Lonergan, Amazon Web Services director of training and certification:

We do it in several ways. We started out by building instructor led training. So we'll go onsite, well used to go onsite, right? It's a different world these days, but we'll deliver it virtually. So we have instructor led training courses that go from one to five days.

Maureen Lonergan, Amazon Web Services director of training and certification:

But we also have a wide portfolio of digital classes, more than 500 on our platform that people can consume topics from foundational level courses, like cloud practitioner, all the way to AIML learning tracks for deep practitioners in that space. We also do have partnerships. So we have more than 130 partners around the globe that are delivering both instructor led training and digital training.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

So you just said that you would maybe go on-site one to five days. So I could learn what I need to know in five days?

Maureen Lonergan, Amazon Web Services director of training and certification:

I think everybody needs to start thinking in terms of learning is a continuous journey. So it definitely will give you a good start at training, but the way that we've designed our training programs is really such that you can consume the information when you need it.

Maureen Lonergan, Amazon Web Services director of training and certification:

So let's say you're a solution architect and you go to our associate solution architect training, once you've gone to the training and started practicing, then you might want to understand a bit more about databases or networking. And we have that information available on our digital platforms such that people can consume it when they need it.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

You've said AWS has set a pretty ambitious goal helping 29 million people around the world grow their tech skills for free by 2025. How are you doing this? You can't do it alone.

Maureen Lonergan, Amazon Web Services director of training and certification:

Well, we're not, we're doing it with our partners. Right? But providing access and technical skills training has always been a really important priority for us. For many years. This isn't new. An access to skills training can help to unlock opportunities that have a positive and long-term impact on our employees, our customers, and our communities.

Maureen Lonergan, Amazon Web Services director of training and certification:

So we're approaching it in several ways. One is through the digital platform, making it available. We also have an academic program called Educate that has learning pathways where we make courseware available for free to university students. And then we also have another program called Restart, which is a 12 week intensive program for people that are out of work or in an underserved community where we want to try and start to skill them up.

Maureen Lonergan, Amazon Web Services director of training and certification:

And so the combination of those programs, along with some of our partnerships like Coursera and EdX where we have content out on their sites is how we plan to get there.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

You talked about Restart. I'm very interested in that. What is the age range for the people that are doing that program? And is it like a restart of a career because what job they were doing before has gone away or it wasn't paying enough?

Maureen Lonergan, Amazon Web Services director of training and certification:

Yeah, I mean, it could be anything, right? We work with partners that find candidates for the program. Right? And I would say people of any age are eligible for it. And a lot of times it is people that either lost their job or they're transitioning from a non tech career to a tech career.

Maureen Lonergan, Amazon Web Services director of training and certification:

We have this great story about Jared Gains, who at the beginning of the pandemic was starting at a gym. He's a physical fitness trainer. And that of kind of got pushed to the side given what happened. So he went to one of our partners and was put into this 12 week training program and now is working at an IT company in a new role. So it's totally transformed and transitioned to his life.

Maureen Lonergan, Amazon Web Services director of training and certification:

And we have another great example of a woman named Elise Rowe who was laid off from an entertainment job on a cruise ship last year during the pandemic. And she didn't have any direct cloud or technical skills, but thought working in tech would be really fun and joined the Restart program and now is working as an engineer at a tech company as well. So we have lots of good examples of people that either lost their job or trying to transition their skills through that program.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

What kind of skills are good for me to have, aside from the technical skills, to be able to prosper in this career?

Maureen Lonergan, Amazon Web Services director of training and certification:

With the restart program it's a combination of tech and soft skills. Right? It's how to operate in a business environment, how to interview, how to hold meetings. It's all of those foundational level skills combined with the tech. And so the program really tries to take someone that has little exposure to tech and position them well for a job in the future.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

We have an acknowledged gender gap in technology.

Maureen Lonergan, Amazon Web Services director of training and certification:

Yeah.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

Are you going after women to get more women in tech in any special way?

Maureen Lonergan, Amazon Web Services director of training and certification:

Yeah, we definitely are. First of all, our design point is really around diversity in general, making our courseware accessible to anybody that wants to consume it. And that's why we largely put most of our content out on our site, on other partners for free.

Maureen Lonergan, Amazon Web Services director of training and certification:

But we're doing some interesting things too where the restart program is one program where we intentionally recruit women into that program to scale them up on tech. We've been working with some really great partners at AWS, and one of them is a company called Slalom.

Maureen Lonergan, Amazon Web Services director of training and certification:

And their CEO, Brad Jackson came to me and said he wanted to make sure that he was super intentional about scaling up people, women in particular, in the organization. His company is growing very, very fast. And so we sat down with them with a plan to train 300 women in non-tech roles within the organization. And we had 900 women sign up and take the training. And more than 400 of them got certified. So it was a structured six month program that we worked with to try and drive the needle on certifications within that company. And so we're doing it that way.

Maureen Lonergan, Amazon Web Services director of training and certification:

And then we have this great program called the AWS Get IT. It's an initiative that was designed by AWS to encourage girls that are 12 to 13 to consider a career in tech by inviting teams from different schools to an app building competition with AWS mentors to solve real problems. And since the launch in 2018, the program has captured the imaginations and grown rapidly. And by the end of 2020, we'll have trained more than 23,000 young girls from 136 schools across [inaudible 00:09:21]. And this year we'll be taking that program around the globe. So super excited about that.

Maureen Lonergan, Amazon Web Services director of training and certification:

Because I think that when you think in terms of women in tech, you have to think about the funnel, right? And you have to make it compelling for them. And we have to start at a younger age and get girls interested in tech. And so programs like this are critical to increasing the pipeline as they go into college and then into the workforce.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

Are you seeing an openness on the other side, on the employer side to hire more women? Because that's the stereotype that the computer geek is a guy and it's not a gal. You know?

Maureen Lonergan, Amazon Web Services director of training and certification:

It's interesting. I talk to customers every single week and I think I am seeing a transition in the marketplace. I would say for diversity overall, but definitely women as well, right? It's like how do we find this skills? Where do we find the skills in the marketplace?

Maureen Lonergan, Amazon Web Services director of training and certification:

But the competition for the limited pool of technical women, talent is high, right? So what we do is we try and work with companies like Slalom to say, okay, well, if you can't find it, we're going to help you build it. And so we put programs together to help to drive that.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

You just touched on a very important point, which is that there is a demand for these skills. There's a demand for people who can do this and not enough people who have the training. So there's that big gap that exists in our country right now and around the world.

Maureen Lonergan, Amazon Web Services director of training and certification:

Yeah. And the gap is getting bigger. The recent numbers are that the tech jobs are going to quadruple over the next 10 years or so. And the gap's going to get bigger and bigger. And so it's on us to try and figure out how to skill as many people.

Maureen Lonergan, Amazon Web Services director of training and certification:

So we do that in a bunch of different ways, right? We work with our customers. We obviously skill our customers. We work with them to take people that aren't in tech roles into tech roles.

Maureen Lonergan, Amazon Web Services director of training and certification:

But we also are really, really focused on the pipeline of the future. And so all these partnerships that we have out there are designed to try and drive tech skills into the marketplace. We have an academic program in more than a thousand universities where we're training tens of thousands of students to drive them towards technical careers in the future.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

At the end of the training there's a certification. Are you helping the people who may come to you outside of a company are you helping them find work, or is there a mentoring part of this or a job placement part?

Maureen Lonergan, Amazon Web Services director of training and certification:

Some of our programs are associated with an opportunity to interview, right? So Restart is definitely one of them. We collaborate with these organizations that help us find the candidates, and then they help to pull companies in together once they've graduated from the program and then get them into the interview cycle with customers. So definitely that.

Maureen Lonergan, Amazon Web Services director of training and certification:

I think when they think in terms of certification, what we tell our customers is look for people with these badges, right? They're well-skilled, they've passed highly complex exams and those are the people that they should be looking for. So while that isn't a job placement, it is a way for employers to identify skill sets that they're looking for in the marketplace.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

Is there an outreach that's going to the underserved communities to try to get people to sign up for these programs as well?

Maureen Lonergan, Amazon Web Services director of training and certification:

Yeah. Yeah. It's definitely through our partnerships and we have many of them kind of across the globe that work within the communities to do this. And that's how the restart program works. And when we go into a state or a new country, we'll find the best partnerships that we can that are embedded in the communities and work with these underserved communities so that we can locate the people that are interested in training.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

You're doing this in over 200 countries and territories?

Maureen Lonergan, Amazon Web Services director of training and certification:

Training in general. We are. Yeah.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

Do you have any examples of what's going on overseas?

Maureen Lonergan, Amazon Web Services director of training and certification:

Yeah so every program that we build, we make it largely available in any country that we can operate in. Right? So all of our digital training is available across the globe. Our instructor led training programs are available either through us or through one of our partnerships. Restart program is a little bit more ... We're growing that program. And we go into countries and build the partnerships and run that training programs.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

You know again, I would point out that 29 million people being trained seems very ambitious, but I know we need a pipeline of talent. Is that going to fill the gap? Is that going to get us enough people?

Maureen Lonergan, Amazon Web Services director of training and certification:

Well it's a start. It's going to be hard to see. Like the IT gap is big and it's big across everything, right? It's not just cloud. So I think from a cloud perspective, we've drawn a line in the ground. We've committed to delivering this and we're going to take our technology and our programs and scale them as fast as we can. The hope is you deliver more, but that is the goal today.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

One of the things we talk about at Working Nation quite often is lifelong learning. Don't be afraid to try something new. And make sure your skills are current with what the demands of the current employers are. Talk a little bit about how would you encourage people who might have said, "Oh, I can't be a tech person. I can't cloud compute." How do you encourage them to take that step?

Maureen Lonergan, Amazon Web Services director of training and certification:

I talk to people every day about that, right? Tech can be intimidating. But I think what we've done at AWS is we're trying to make it non-intimidating, right?

Maureen Lonergan, Amazon Web Services director of training and certification:

I think one of the things we've made a huge investment in is digital learning, providing little tiny learning modules and labs that people can consume at their own pace. And I think that's less intimidating, right? They're not sitting in a classroom and struggling through concepts. They're allowed to take 10 or 15 minutes, take a break, come back to it. And so I think the way that we've designed training is really around that lifelong learning. It's a continuous learning journey, and I think it becomes less intimidating when you can get small chunks of information and then start to build your skillset based on that.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

So I'm interested in doing this. What's my next step?

Maureen Lonergan, Amazon Web Services director of training and certification:

I think the first thing you do is go out to aws.training. And the number one most popular course we have is a course called cloud practitioner. It's six or seven hours of content broken up into these 10 minute modules. And it gives you the foundations of what AWS is and some of our services. And it's a great class. We just revamped it. And it's the number one most consumed class on our website today.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

Maureen Lonergan, Director Of Training And Certification For Amazon Web Services. My guest today, Maureen, thank you very much. Thank you. I'm Ramona Schindelheim Editor In Chief Of Working Nation. Thank you for listening.