

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

You're listening to Work in Progress. I'm Ramona Schindelheim, editor-in-chief of WorkingNation. Work in Progress explores the rapidly changing workplace through conversations with innovators, educators, and decision-makers, people with solutions to today's workforce challenges.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

Last week, IBM announced a new initiative to provide more than 500,000 workers globally with the skills they need to land good jobs. Joining me now on the podcast to talk about it is Justina Nixon-Saintil, Vice President and Global Head of Corporate Social Responsibility at IBM. Justina, welcome to the podcast.

Justina Nixon-Saintil, IBM Global Head of CSR:

Hi, Ramona. Thank you for having me.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

This is a big undertaking I think, 500,000 people getting them skilled up for jobs today. Tell me a little bit about what is motivating the company to make this offer.

Justina Nixon-Saintil, IBM Global Head of CSR:

At IBM, we believe everyone should have the chance to succeed. And what's really motivating us is how technology is changing society. And when you think about the future of automation, how people are going to recover from the pandemic, there's the sense of urgency to make sure that everyone has the skills they need to be successful and move into meaningful jobs. I think this is something that we need to do. And the reason that we focused on skilling half-a-million people before the end of the year is because we believe we have to take big and bold steps to make sure that we provide access to tech skills, to workplace learning skills, regardless of anyone's background, we need to make sure that everyone is prepared for the jobs of today and the jobs of the future.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

Technology is moving so quickly and the skills are changing. Sometimes the jobs are not changing, but the skills are changing. You're an engineer so you've probably seen this yourself.

Justina Nixon-Saintil, IBM Global Head of CSR:

Yeah, absolutely. I am a mechanical engineer. It's been a long time. I obtained my degree over 20 years ago. But I think technology is shifting so quickly. It's funny. I was just discussing with someone earlier today that IBM invented Fortran, and that was the coding language I learned when I was in the engineering school. Fortran I believe is hardly existing today. So, when you think about how technology is changing, how tech skills are constantly evolving and how we need to make sure that job seekers are prepared for the types of opportunities that are available in companies today, it's really imperative that companies like IBM lean in and make sure they provide them the skilling and training and all of the supports needed for everyone to be successful. That's why IBM is very focused on expanding our SkillsBuild program so that we make sure that students and professionals, job seekers, and small businesses builds critical skills through our free online courses, our programs, and our badge credentials and help them really be prepared for the job market.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

One of the criticisms of the tech industry that is being addressed by IBM and other companies is the diversity in the hiring. How do you think that will help address that issue?

Justina Nixon-Saintil, IBM Global Head of CSR:

Diversity in hiring is one of the biggest topics today, and it's always been an issue. What we are very focused on with IBM SkillsBuild is how we reach underrepresented populations. How do we reach black and brown communities, women who have been left out of the tech fields. We're very aware that the pandemic has really affected women in the workforce, and we want to make sure that we are reaching them and providing the skills and the support they need to reenter the workforce and again move into meaningful jobs. What we're very focused on is partnerships with nonprofit organizations who can reach marginalized populations, diverse populations, those who have been left out of the high in demand, high paying tech jobs, and make sure they have the skills to be selected.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

Is this for roles that people need a four-year degree for, or is it for people who just need a certification?

Justina Nixon-Saintil, IBM Global Head of CSR:

These are roles where you do not need a four-year degree. IBM has invested in new collar jobs for quite some time. And these are the jobs where you can be successful if you have a credential or if you have expertise in a certain area. So for example, we realized that you don't need a four-year degree necessarily for an entry level cyber security job or data analytics job. We're able to provide that with IBM SkillsBuild by providing the training and the certificate so that you can actually obtain employment in those areas. So, of course, we are [inaudible 00:05:18] proponents of anyone who moves through college, able to attain a four-year degree. Absolutely. But we do believe that there are many opportunities with high paying jobs where you can obtain them with an associates degree or a certificate program and be able to be successful as well.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

We talk a lot about the skills that are needed to do the jobs that are available today. So someone out there listening now, what can we tell them? What kind of skills could they learn and what kind of jobs could they get?

Justina Nixon-Saintil, IBM Global Head of CSR:

We found that the most popular digital badges that are earned on IBM SkillsBuild are cyber security. That's absolutely the top one that people access. But also, we have a lot of professional skills, and then just training around job applications essentials that we noticed that a lot of people are accessing and leveraging as well. But the skills we realize are definitely the tech skills. Cyber security, data analytics, definitely top of the list. But also customer service, workplace skills like collaboration and presentation, job placed in application essentials. All of those are skills that we can provide to participants and learners so that they can be successful in their job search.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

So those last skills that you talked about, those are not technical skills, but they're skills that everybody needs on a job to succeed and help move up the ladder?

Justina Nixon-Saintil, IBM Global Head of CSR:

Absolutely. And we've found that if you have the hard skills or the tech skills but you don't have what we consider to be more of those softer skills, the collaboration, the creativity, the problem solving skills, then you're not going to be as successful, so we do believe that our learners need to access the full body of offerings that we have so that they can be attractive to employers.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

Is SkillsBuild a new initiative? How long has that been around?

Justina Nixon-Saintil, IBM Global Head of CSR:

Actually, we launched it as a pilot program in 2019 in a few countries. And only a few months ago, we expanded the platform to the US market. But it is not a new platform, but we have seen significant demand. As of May, just last month, over 215,000 people have joined IBM SkillsBuild. And as we shared with you, we have a goal of skilling 500,000 people before the end of the year.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

How do people access this? Kind of walk me through where do I go, how do I get the programming.

Justina Nixon-Saintil, IBM Global Head of CSR:

Yeah, it's really easy. They can access [skillsbuild.org](https://skillsbuild.org). We actually have the platform in five languages; English, French, German, Japanese, and Spanish. But [skillsbuild.org](https://skillsbuild.org), they can actually assess themselves to see what makes sense, what are the skills that they need to take advantage of. It's powered by IBM's AI, Watson. It can provide them with clear direction on the types of training they need to take advantage of and also connect them to employment opportunities.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

You mentioned that you have partners that are helping IBM SkillsBuild provide this training. And just last week you announced an expansion. You went from 60 to 90 organizations, many here in the US and many around the world. Tell us a little bit about the US located programs.

Justina Nixon-Saintil, IBM Global Head of CSR:

We have a number of organizations that we've partnered with in the US. For example, the Bay Area Community College Consortium is working with community college students and the IBM SkillsBuild platform. VetsInTech is another organization that's focused on veterans. Workforce Development is another organization. And of course, ManpowerGroup is the company that is providing the employment opportunities for those who attained the credentials and badges from the IBM SkillsBuild platform. We are very proud of this partnerships and we want to continue to expand them as we reach for more people this year.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

Is all of the SkillsBuild program online or is there any hands-on practical experience?

Justina Nixon-Saintil, IBM Global Head of CSR:

Yes. We provide both. For learners who want to just access the platform, they're able to walk through all of the training, take advantage of what we offer, and obtain a badge or credential. But we also have in-person, hands-on, project-based learning opportunities as well. So with many of our nonprofit partners, we are actually bringing in the skills and the training to people in-person depending on the location. And of course, we have to be careful with COVID as well, but we definitely offer in-person, hands-on opportunities globally.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

You mentioned Manpower is helping connect people who go through the programs with actual employment opportunities. Is there a number of businesses that are actually signed up with IBM? How are you making that happen?

Justina Nixon-Saintil, IBM Global Head of CSR:

Yeah. ManpowerGroup will provide the connections to businesses. We have the number of businesses that are looking for people who are skilled in cybersecurity, as I mentioned earlier, or data analytics. Manpower will bring those opportunities to the forefront. We don't have insight in the exact list of companies that are hiring at this time, but we do know that there is demand. And Manpower is looking forward to working with IBM SkillsBuild learners and participants to provide those employment opportunities.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

How are you getting the word out about this? This is again to me, I always think this is a remarkable thing, that this free training is available to people. How are you sharing that information with people to make sure that they know that it's there?

Justina Nixon-Saintil, IBM Global Head of CSR:

We are sharing this information through channels like yours, right? Through podcasts. We are promoting the opportunity widely through our nonprofit organizations. We're going to continue to communicate this through different methods. I think what we've done really well in the last couple of years is really work with our organizations on the ground to reach the people who need the skills the most. And they communicate and market these opportunities. There is significant demand as you know. This is a free end-to-end solution that we're offering. We are going to continue to work with our partners to promote this opportunity. And also, IBM is going to continue to communicate it widely as well.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

Finally, what is your measure of success? I always like to know what an organization wants to get out of this. What will be the ultimate goal that you reach?

Justina Nixon-Saintil, IBM Global Head of CSR:

Yeah, that's a great question and it's something we talk about a lot. Number one, it's our responsibility to make sure that we are not leaving anyone behind especially as technology and innovation and automation is taking place in society. So, we want to make sure that we are moving people forward, making sure they have the skills they need, and making sure that they can move into meaningful jobs. It's not enough to just have people registered on the platform. I think it's great for us to bring awareness

to it and break that people are accessing the platform, but we want to make sure that they are earning those badges and credentials and move into meaningful jobs. We are tracking a number of different things, active users, number one. Employment opportunities, number two. And then in the long run, we would love to know that people continue to re-skill and be upskilled because we believe continuous learning is how you become more and more successful in the future. So those are our measures of success.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

Justina, I wish you and IBM luck. Thank you very much for joining us.

Justina Nixon-Saintil, IBM Global Head of CSR:

Thank you so much. And again, thank you for having me.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

My guest today is Justina Nixon-Saintil, Vice President and Global Head of Corporate Social Responsibility at IBM. I'm Ramona Schindelheim, editor-in-chief of WorkingNation. Thank you for listening.