



OPERATION ENTERPRISE

Bridging the Gap Between Education and Workforce Readiness

BY AMA STAFF

Some say that life begins at the end of your comfort zone.

For Casey DeWoody, born and raised in the suburbs of Philadelphia, life took a dramatic turn when she stepped out of hers and entered college at UCLA. “I studied hard in high school, but I wasn’t really confident in my leadership, communication, and business skills,” she says. “School just hadn’t prepared me for what was to come.” Unfortunately, DeWoody is not alone.

HIGHLY EDUCATED, BUT UNPREPARED

According to Pew Research, Millennials are set to be the most-educated generation in U.S. history. Yet despite their heavy investment in education, Millennials currently have the highest levels of unemployment and make significantly less than their parents did at the same stage in life. Studies show that although 90% of college graduates feel confident they are adequately prepared for the workplace, employers are critical of their analytical thinking, communication, and public speaking skills, saying they just aren’t ready to succeed in the workplace. Study after study reveals a shocking disparity between student competencies and the skills that employers are demanding. Consider these recent findings:

- 60% of companies say new college graduates are not ready for the workforce
- More than 40% of employers report having difficulty finding qualified candidates for open positions
- 59% of employers report having difficulty finding employees with strong soft skills

The career and workplace readiness gap is even more pronounced when the data is segmented by economically disadvantaged versus affluent students. Perhaps not surprisingly, 57% of private sector, full-time workers have reported that they want to learn a new skill set to land a better-paying, more fulfilling job, but half of them said they can’t afford to do so.

“The future of every community depends on its youth,” says Marina Marmut, director, Operation Enterprise, at American Management Association. “They are the next generation of business leaders, and when they thrive, the communities

they live in are likely to do the same, with stronger economies, greater environmental awareness, social responsibility, superior schools, and solid ethical values. We need to do more to prepare them to enter the workforce and succeed, and we need to make this available to all students, regardless of their ability to pay.”

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS SMOOTH THE TRANSITION FROM STUDENT TO EMPLOYEE

In 2013, the U.S. Department of Education began the college scorecard—a measure of vital statistics for colleges such as costs, value, and quality of education, including the average earnings of graduates. This increased scrutiny of education and the ROI of traditional educational paths has sparked a revival of career readiness programs in high schools and colleges. Looking to ward off the oncoming talent war, many organizations have also started to partner with educational providers to develop and recruit talent with specific skill sets.

In the midst of this transformation in education, some programs, such as Operation Enterprise, have been running successfully for more than 50 years.

“Back in the late 1960s, I was a high school student in an inner-city school in Indianapolis when I was selected to participate in Operation Enterprise,” says Roger Stark, one of the original Operation Enterprise graduates. “My mother worked in a factory for a buck an hour, and I was juggling school while also working 30 hours a week to help pay for food and clothes for the family. Eli Lilly, a local pharmaceutical company, had decided to sponsor two students from my area to go for a two-week program at the American Management Association. It was a truly transformational experience. I knew I was good at what I did—I graduated in the top 10% of my class. But it wasn’t until I was in this program that I realized I could stand and run with anyone—I didn’t have to take a second seat. If I was willing to put in the effort, it was mine for the taking. It had an enormous effect on my self-confidence.”

With that newfound confidence and sense of purpose, Stark led several corporate positions and eventually founded his



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own company, BrainWare Learning Company (MyBrainWare.com). “I was inspired by one of the speakers who said it was his mission to give back to the community, and that’s what we do. We make software that uses neurological principles to help people learn more effectively and reach their full potential. I want everyone to be able to have the same kind of transformational experience I had.”

Created by American Management Association, a global leader in talent transformation for nearly a century, Operation Enterprise now serves up to 15,000 students through customized educational programs—and its programs continue to expand through corporate sponsorships.

“AMA partners with organizations all over the world, including the majority of Fortune 500 companies, to develop effective leadership development programs,” says Marmut. “We took our robust curriculum and knowledge of what works to create dynamic, hands-on workshops that cover every aspect of being a working professional. We have a business curriculum, of course, but we go beyond that. From management, leadership, and communication to entrepreneurship, networking, and social styles, we bring all of this together to help students gain business skills, build confidence, and sharpen their focus.”

“ At 16, I went to Operation Enterprise.... I admit, I didn’t know what OE or AMA was. I didn’t know that OE would completely change the trajectory of my life. OE has made me who I am. You’re ready to take on the world! ...Constant inspiration and introspection, with peers and mentors in an intimate setting. I needed to sleep for days after this program because I was so excited every minute I was there. After OE at 17, I went on to serve as a Rotary Exchange Student to the Philippines; complete my BA at George Washington University in D.C., MA in Australia; serve as a Rotary Ambassadorial Scholar to New Zealand; complete my doctorate in Economic Development in Rural Wine Regions. To this day, the friendships and connections I made through Operation Enterprise are the most enduring. The skills I learned—communication, business writing, managerial skills, leadership, etc.—were far more impactful than anything I learned in my BA, MA, or PhD curriculum. This is real-world experts in an intimate setting—people that want to coach you on an individual level. I wish I could go back and do it over and over again.”



—Daisy Dawson



“The curriculum and structure of the OE program... provided me with the tools to be successful as I entered into my collegiate and professional careers.”

—Casey DeWoody

“I wasn't always the smartest student, and at the same time I didn't really know what I wanted to do in the future. It all changed when I attended the workshops at AMA. During the AMA sessions, I learned a lot about professionalism and learned what it's like working there. I was extremely impressed with the professional attire. These skills changed me as a person and helped me build my leadership skill. Ever since that day, I started getting involved and took advantage of every opportunity. Those skills helped me get my first internship at Virtual Enterprise Internationals. Today I am attending University at Buffalo and I'm also the chief operations officer at Khushi Realty Buffalo Inc., a family business. This wouldn't have happened if I never attended the program.”

—Isfak Islam



but it also afforded me a confidence in myself I hadn't previously experienced—pushing me beyond my comfort zone to expand my competencies in the areas of leadership, communication, and business management.”

The structure of the program—a combination of classroom courses, team projects, one-on-one tutorials, mentoring, panel discussions, and teamwork activities—fosters collaboration across a diverse student group and allows participants to form long-lasting friendships while improving business knowledge and leadership skills. “With the confidence I gained throughout the program,” says DeWoody, “I was set for success.”

Establishing mentoring relationships for students and giving them the opportunity to network can really help open doors for students. “More than 15 years later, I still keep in touch with several of the people I met and I still use the skills I learned,” says Michael Simmons, Operation Enterprise graduate. “Everything from the panel and simulation to speakers and evening events made such a big impact on me that they will be in my heart forever. I plan to have my kids apply to OE too.”

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING OFFERS LASTING RESULTS

Research has shown that experiential learning methods improve student engagement, support knowledge acquisition, and boost retention.

American Management Association has been refining its professional education offerings for nearly 100 years. AMA's unique blend of experiential learning and practical, action-oriented curriculum leads to long-lasting results.

“It has been over 10 years since I attended OE,” says Alyssa Gruska. “As I look back to reflect on the program, I can say confidently that the program shaped my career in ways that I didn't realize it could. I became a lawyer with my own practice in New York and dedicate most of my time [to] defending indigent clients in state and federal court. Whether I am speaking before a judge, to a jury, to a client, or to opposing counsel, my ability to communicate and connect with people has defined my success thus far, and all thanks to the skills I first developed at Operation Enterprise.”

DeWoody agrees, “I embarked on the OE experience at UCLA in 2006. The curriculum and structure of the OE program not only provided me with the tools to be successful as I entered into my collegiate and professional careers,

RISE OF THE AGILE LEARNER

A crucial part of career readiness programs is to develop the right mindset. Organizations are struggling to keep up

“Operation Enterprise came at a time in my life where my professional and academic skills were just starting to take shape. I was a junior in high school, with a lot of ambition and goals, but I did not have a defined skill set to get me to where I wanted to go. OE gave me the platform to discover my strengths. Without the training and experience that I received at OE at such a crucial time in my life, I do not think I would be the effective orator, advocate, and leader that I am today. It was through Operation Enterprise that I discovered my passion for connecting with people through public speaking. I have spent the last 10 years refining and developing the skills I first learned at Operation Enterprise.”

—Alyssa Gruska



“AMA has always strived to improve the quality of life for both individuals and communities, offering business skills to millions worldwide and reaching out to the public with educational initiatives.”

—Marina Marmut, Director, Operation Enterprise

“Through the relationships I nurtured in OE and the skills the program helped hone, I developed the confidence I needed to succeed. OE gave me the tools to fill my toolbox so I was able to capitalize on opportunities as they were presented. It expanded my views and showed me that there were more possibilities for my future that I hadn’t even contemplated.”



—Katrina Philp

in a volatile, uncertain, and complex environment. Technical skills and business acumen are only a piece of what students will need to be successful. They’ll also need adaptability, problem-solving, and resilience skills.

In addition, students and employees need to change how they view education. Gone are the days where a diploma or degree was enough to prepare students for their entire working career. Today, the half-life of many professional skills is only five years, which means the average employee will need to upskill or retrain eight times in his or her career. Employees who embrace change as an inherent part of business and actively seek out educational experiences to improve or increase their competencies stand out and rise to the top of the talent pool.

“Built into our program are not only business skills such as financial literacy, business writing, and conflict resolution, but also job readiness skills,” says Marmut. “We set up mentoring relationships for students to prepare them mentally for the shift in being in a learning environment to being in the workforce. We teach them the basics like resume writing and interviewing, of course, but we also cover things like branding yourself, projecting a positive professional image, and above all, having the right attitude.”

“One thing OE taught me that has stayed with me forever,” says Operation Enterprise graduate DeWoody, “is that equipped with the right tools and self-confidence, there is no reason to fear a new experience and to push yourself to grow as a business leader and as an individual!”

“AMA has always strived to improve the quality of life for both individuals and communities, offering business skills

to millions worldwide and reaching out to the public with educational initiatives,” says Marmut. “Over the years, we’ve partnered with organizations such as the Boy Scouts of America, DECA, National Academy Foundation, NPower, Future Business Leaders of America (FBLA), and high schools and colleges across the country to bring our program to more students. We’re exceptionally proud to offer this program and have great plans to expand through corporate sponsorships.”

SPONSOR AN OPERATION ENTERPRISE PROGRAM IN YOUR COMMUNITY

Sponsorship offers you a great opportunity to increase the visibility of your organization while supporting the youth who will be the future business leaders in your area. OE programs help ensure today’s youth have the skills your business needs. Corporate grant funding and sponsorship support for OE’s programs and events will also be acknowledged on the OE website and other marketing materials, helping to drive more traffic to your website. [AQ](#)

To find out more about sponsorships, contact Marina Marmut, Director, Operation Enterprise, at mmarmut@amanet.org

“Adolescence is a time of uncertainty, exploration, and growth. When I attended OE, I was a junior in high school, and like many of my peers, unsure of my future. Listening and actively partaking in the seminars at OE, I realized I wanted to pave my own path and work for myself. Taking the skills and learnings from OE, I applied them to countless business ventures over the next 10 years. With each venture, I learned important lessons that I carried with me until I ultimately found my passion and created a business around it. I now run a very successful photography and film studio in Manhattan, NY, and get to travel the world capturing beautiful imagery and telling compelling stories for my clients. Had it not been for my days at OE, I might never have had the skill set, persistence, or knowledge to continue my pursuit for my dream job. OE will forever be a part of my past and, my hope is, a part of your future.”



—Michael Porco