

COMMUNICATION & ENGAGEMENT

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EDUCATION BENEFITS

From barista to college grad: Starbucks pays for higher ed

Coffee giant partners with Arizona State University to offer employees free college education

BY NICK OTTO

Starbucks is helping its full- and part-time employees earn college degrees through a partnership with Arizona State University's online program beginning this fall. The collaboration, touted as a "first of its kind," will allow Starbucks' employees to graduate debt-free from ASU with no requirement to repay fees or stay on with the company.

"It seems clear that Starbucks is using this new program to target two of HR's biggest challenges — attracting the best and brightest tal-

ent, and retaining that talent over time," says Carol Sladek, partner and work-life consulting lead at Aon Hewitt. "Especially in a highly hourly workforce, the cost of turnover can be significant as new employees continually need to be trained and onboarded."

Employer of choice

Sladek calls the benefit "unique," as it provides a "richer than average" tuition reimbursement program through one specific partner, allowing the company to focus on being an employer of choice to help retain their hourly talent, she says.

Through the program, Star-



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Internal employee training can be a valuable benefit, yet much of the money companies spend on training programs is wasted, contends John Tsohl, president of Service Quality Institute, a customer service training company. To view his top 10 reasons group training fails, go to <http://bit.ly/N2igqF>.

bucks employees who work at least 20 hours a week will receive full tuition reimbursement if they enroll in ASU's online program as juniors or seniors. Freshmen and sophomores will receive a partial scholarship and needs-based financial aid toward the foundational work of completing their degree.

All benefits-eligible employees based in the U.S., working in sup-

port centers, plants or at any of the company-operated stores — including Teavana, La Boulange, Evolution Fresh and Seattle's Best Coffee stores — who do not yet have a bachelor's degree, can apply.

Only time will tell if other employers take on similar programs,

Benefits-eligible employees who do not yet have a bachelor's degree can apply.

and Starbucks' experience will certainly help drive any future momentum in this direction, Sladek says.

"In the U.S., we are on the verge of seeing an entire generation of young people left behind due in part to skyrocketing tuition costs," Starbucks says. "Now is the right time to partner with a like-minded university [that] recognizes the need to do something to address one of the single most important challenges facing young adults."

Some companies, such as McDonalds, do offer internal education programs, such as the fast-food

giant's Hamburger University program, which company spokesman Steve Mazeika says also awards some college credit for certain training courses.

"Additionally, in the U.S., the English Under the Arches program is another resource that helps crew members and managers learn and enhance their English language skills," Mazeika says. ■