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UMKC TalentLink executive director Jake Akhurst

LINKING TO THE FUTURE

Professional and personal
development is the focus
of UMKC TalentLink.

When choosing a partner to launch and implement the five-month, nine-session Leadership Leawood program this January, Stephanie Meyer, chamber president, knew exactly who to contact. (For more on the leadership program, turn to page 12.)

Throughout her professional life, Meyer has been an ardent believer in leadership programs. When she assumed her current position as president and chief executive officer of the Leawood Chamber and Economic Development Council, she quickly initiated plans for the leadership development program. The program's goal is to help existing and aspiring leaders throughout the community to learn new skills and improve existing ones.

Meyer had worked with UMKC TalentLink executive director Jake Akehurst previously. UMKC TalentLink formally launched in January 2022 as part of the University of Missouri-Kansas City's UMKC Forward initiative, when the world was recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic.

UMKC TalentLink provides professional development through expert-led courses for those wishing to either learn new work skills or

improve existing skills. It offers training and skill development in a wide variety of disciplines. It includes leadership training, which made it an easy choice for Meyer and her Leadership Leawood program.

UMKC TalentLink provided the first two sessions of a "Leadership with Purpose" workshop developed by instructor, coach, and communication expert Warren Wandling. Twenty-two leaders or aspiring leaders, all members of the Leawood Chamber of Commerce, attended each six-hour session, held January 25 and February 8 and facilitated by Wandling.

"We focused from a corporate business perspective," says Wandling, who's been an instructor with UMKC TalentLink for two years. "We want to help executives upgrade leadership skills through both group coaching and individual coaching. It was a great group of leaders and made for a great workshop."

"TalentLink has a great reputation," Meyer says. "We wanted to provide real-world leadership training. They've been a phenomenal partner. Hopefully, this leads to additional qualified leaders in the chamber and the city."

"It's short-term, skill-based ... looking at the best way people can pick up practical skills. I would say (most learners) are people interested in attaining new skills, whether that's wanting to make career switches, or those wanting to move up in their company."

—JAKE AKEHURST

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

UMKC TalentLink's professional development helps employees learn practical skills in a short, focused timeframe. They partner with UMKC schools, education resources, and experts in their





FOR MORE

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fields to provide top-notch instructors, course curricula, and certificate programs.

“We have all the resources of (UMKC),” Akehurst says. “We can tap into the faculty or work with external instructors. We have the best of both worlds.”

Employees can take workshops, courses, and certificate programs online, in person, or onsite at a workplace. Training can be designed to meet specific development needs and can be individualized or done in group settings.

In addition to leadership training, UMKC TalentLink offers programs for first-time supervisors, as well as trainings that focus on “soft skills” useful in successfully navigating the workplace, such as intercultural development, human resources, web development, manufacturing, and health-care skills. UMKC TalentLink engages with partners—recently with WorkForge for manufacturing training and MedCerts for healthcare training—for their industry-specific programs.

“It’s short-term, skill-based ... looking at the best way people can pick up practical skills,” Akehurst says. “I would say (most learners) are people interested in attaining new skills, whether that’s wanting to make career switches, or those wanting to move up in their company.”

Housed in UMKC’s Innovation Center, TalentLink has direct lines to the Missouri Small Business Development Center,

Technology Venture Studio, and KC and MO SourceLink for regional entrepreneurial ecosystem building.

“A lot of our business comes from employers that want to retain people,” Akehurst says. “They want to invest in their employees. Unemployment is low right now, so we want to help employers recruit good people and then retain them.”

STAYING NIMBLE

With direct access to many different resources, UMKC TalentLink adapts what it can offer businesses and nonprofits. Their flexibility to develop and tailor information and course material for clients is important in an ever-changing workforce environment.

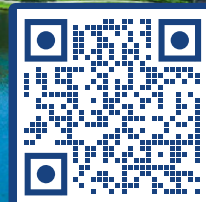
“We’ve consistently tried to roll out new products that meet demands at the time,” Akehurst says. “We want to put out training that is deliberate and in need. Education is changing. We can pivot, be nimble, and work quickly to help a business or individual.”

That changing landscape also includes civic leadership. Meyer at the chamber says she will be calling on UMKC TalentLink again to help navigate even more changes down the road.

“We’ve been thrilled with the response (of the Leadership with Purpose workshop) thus far,” Meyer says. “It’s all been very positive.”

“We’ll continue to plan with Leadership Leawood, and UMKC TalentLink will certainly be a part of those plans.” LM

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To see our blog scan here