

US-Americans rediscover Apprenticeships ...

1. Why have I moved to the United States with my family?

As always, there are professional (pertinent) and personal (sentimental) reasons. Professionally speaking the challenge excited me, to help set up a working Apprenticeship system in a country which, up to now, has relied largely on its schools for the education of its youth and actually has failed (with the exemption of a small elite). During my entire professional career in Switzerland I was involved with Apprentices, Apprenticeship sponsors and Apprenticeships. And I feel very comfortable to be involved in the permanent renewal and refining process of the dual system. Other educational areas are of less importance to me.

On the more personal side, beautiful memories of my two years as a German - assistant in schools in the USA and my subsequent solidarity with this country and the knowledge of its language, its people and habits have played a decisive role. Then the beautiful weather (Austin is situated on the level of Cairo), which my family and I missed so much in Switzerland. And finally it is a great opportunity for our five-year old daughter, to grow up bilingual and bicultural; an asset for lifetime.

So I have tried to stay in touch with the American Apprenticeship scene for the last

five years and am therefore up to date what develops here. The election of Bill Clinton to the American presidency has naturally helped this scene to boom, since he has signed the so-called 'School - to - Work Act' last spring, which furthers workforce development in the USA.

Often we are asked how long we will stay here. We do not know; it depends on many elements. For one on our visa status (my current visa [foreign expert] is valid a maximum of 5 years) and then also on the political developments in the USA, since the Capital Area Training Foundation is a non - profit - organization financed through federal grants. And finally the age of starting first grade in Switzerland of our daughter (summer 1997) will also play a decisive role.

2. With which ideas and intents have we traveled to the USA?

2.1. Ideas

I must say first, that I was pretty well up to date what was going on in school-to-work over here through intense contacts with the American Apprenticeship scene during the last 5 years. My major conclusions based on this information from across the Atlantic were: there is much traveling to study European models (I had several visitors from the USA in Zurich myself), materials that are translated from German into English,

there is much talking at conferences, there are a lot of basic and other papers written, and -- - there are almost no Apprenticeships. My task would therefore be to sell all these ideas in Austin, by using my over 25 years of experience in the area of application and transformation.

I also knew that my contact in Austin, Dr. Bob Glover, a research scientist at the local University of Texas, was an American supporter of Apprenticeship of the first hour who knew the dual system well through several visits to Germany. And furthermore Austin had selected thirteen high school graduates last fall, who began abbreviated Apprenticeships in skilled crafts in January 1995 in Koblenz, Germany. These Apprenticeships became possible through Austin's excellent relationships to the Chamber of Skilled Crafts, Koblenz, and because Koblenz is one of its sister cities. And these young Austinites can help to make the idea of Apprenticeship known here.

2.2. Intentions

I have put the following emphases for my work on the other side of the Atlantic ocean:

- Establish as many Apprenticeships as possible as quickly as possible and to have one

hundred apprentices in the first year.

- Help Apprenticeship sponsors in all elements of Apprenticeship training (like selection, worksite learning and evaluation, develop workplace mentor training for worksite supervisors etc.
- Supervise the exchange of apprentices with Koblenz and initiate other international activities (e.g. an exchange of banking Apprentices with Switzerland).
- Support my colleagues at the Capital Area Training Foundation with internal training to let them participate in my advantage in experience.

3. Which situation have met I here?

I would like to answer this question on two levels: (1) the economic every day situation in reference to the education of the working population of the USA and (2) the situation at the Capital Area Training Foundation, my employer.

3.1. In everyday life

The economic situation of the USA in regards to the education of the working population is not surprisingly a copy of the structure of schools. The USA have most probably the best university system of the world. It serves, indeed, as in other places of the world, only a very small elite of the population. By the way, today 40% of the students at American universities are foreigners, and the number is growing. These universities produce specialists who develop

extremely advanced products and processes for competition in a world market. Accordingly strong are the USA for instance in areas like the manufacturing of semiconductors (especially here in Austin). And the strong tradition of Taylorism - division of a work routine in smallest possible steps which also untrained workers can do satisfactorily - has resulted in the USA manufacturing good and cheap products.

On the other side it is obvious that the large number of persons is missing here who maintains and repairs or just is able to utilize these products. The level in skilled and executing occupations is questionable: to bring the car to the garage means to probably give it to a more or less untrained crafter. To build a house means to enter an adventure with many self-appointed specialists. To go to the bank means to face a badly paid student untrained in banking, who doesn't really have a clue about banking and can do deposits and payments only. My video camera came back after two months from the repair shop completely demolished with the information that it was a European model; now it is in Switzerland under repair. Errors occur all the time, one can say they are the norm.

To use the much used picture of the iceberg: The USA have a well educated tip of the iceberg (like we do in Switzerland also by the way), but the broad basis of occupational professionals is missing here, to support this tip accordingly (which are produced through the

Apprenticeship system in Switzerland). This situation is obvious in everyday life: as Swiss people, we are confronted with incomprehensible dilettantism daily. When we address this with our American friends, we realize that they have gotten used to it and don't expect anything better anymore. The so-called 'throw away society' has a completely new dimension of explanation here: What should I do, if I can neither personally repair an instrument nor find anybody, who does this expertly for me? And the replacement in the shop is relatively cheap?

This situation has become a genuine problem for businesses that have to compete in a world market and so they have an open ear for Apprenticeship projects (more about this later, however).

3.2. On the job

The Capital Area Training Foundation is a little bit a copy of the American educational scene: Beside the management and administration there are six exempt (and really self-appointed) career specialists working in high schools on the implementation of so-called Career Centers. Another three exempt social workers work in an other high school in a poor area of Austin on the professional preparation of at-risk students. And Mary, journalist (half day); Al, learned tool and die maker - yes, he has graduated from a

real Apprenticeship here in the USA - (on Mondays and on Tuesdays); Suzanne, teacher (now and then); and I (always) are responsible for the contacts to the world of work as so-called Industry Liaisons. An extreme imbalance (9 : 2) in favor of the school-side exists here also. We meticulously build a stable, beautiful bridge, with numbered screws and bolts; only the other bank (meaningful and all encompassing training) is unfortunately neither in view nor altogether defined.

What is the problem?
Worldwide school-based systems tend to focus mostly on the needs of the pupils/students and the teachers. This explains phenomena like the too many academics (Akademikerschwemme) in Germany. And this also explains why here in the USA most people with various degrees work in completely different areas than their study majors were. Such an educational system is not market driven.

The Apprenticeship system on the other side is clearly market-driven, with all the advantages and disadvantages: not enough Apprenticeship slots in popular occupations, shortage of Apprentices in less popular occupations, abolishment of Apprenticeship slots in times of recession, longer time of reaction of the economy to climbing and sinking numbers of youth, uncertainty at Apprenticeship schools regarding numbers of students. The market acts and reacts from an economic rather than a social point of view.

In 1994 at a conference here in Austin, the CEO of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Hanover, Dr. Wilfried Prewo, has outlined the following three principles for the construction of a working Apprenticeship system in the USA:

- **First**, you must have a private-public partnership with clear-cut responsibilities: The training companies must be in the driver's seat and be willing to lead. (...)

- **Second**, the system must be work-based: in the mix of school-based and work-based learning, two thirds of the apprentice's time should be spent in the workplace. (...)

- **Third**, you must build a system. Aim for a system and not for just another program. (...)

I am in total agreement with him. And based on these principles one can give an estimate for a time frame for the undertaking of 'workforce development in the USA'. We're talking of years and decades to install this additional system of occupational training here, parallel to and in connection with the purely scholastic one.

4. Preview for next time

What were the first activities that I got involved in here? How went my contacts with American banks and with the municipal administration of the city of Austin? What happens in the area of the semiconductor manufacturers, the largest and strongest employers here? What about the Capital Area Training

Foundation; does the grant from Washington also come under a Republican Congress? Read more about it in the next 'panorama'.