

The work begins

'You have reached the voice mail of XY. Sorry, I can't answer your call. If you leave your name and telephone number after the beep, I'll get back to you as soon as possible. Beep.'

According to my goals, I have immediately started to get in touch with local banks. That is not so simple here. Answering machines are omnipresent in the USA. Hardly ever one is actually connected to a person; mostly one speaks with a machine. Americans call this game 'telephone tag'. And what really makes me mad - even now, after almost a year here - is the fact that most people do not call me back. So it is very time consuming to get in touch with somebody.

My first meeting with a local banker, however, was very promising: He was very worried about the rapid turnover of his employees, mourned the absence of an effective educational system in banking, and wanted his people with customer contact (e.g. tellers and switchboard operators) to be better educated. My conclusion was: he is looking for an apprenticeship in banking as we know it in Germanic lands.

Back in my own four walls - which, by the way, were those of a hotel room, since we obviously still had no steady place to stay - I started to add American elements to a Swiss-style banking apprenticeship to create an American apprenticeship in banking. Initially, I attempted to have the apprenticeship start in the last or second last year of high school, that is at age 17 or 18, but this proved to be impossible because of the irrevocable class schedule of these schools - students have to be at school every day to

about the middle of the afternoon, and that leaves too little time for on-the-job-training. Instead, I decided to concentrate on a combination of work-based learning and community college level schooling. By the way, a large number of American business people think very poorly about high school students and their education: they are considered immature and unable to talk or calculate or write.

American community colleges offer an education which is comparable with the one of our vocational training schools, but normally without the worksite learning aspect (see also enclosed table: Comparison between Swiss and US Degree Levels in Occupations). I therefore designed an apprenticeship during which the apprentices would go to the Community College for an average of one and a half days per week and would learn on the job for the remainder of the week. They would finish this apprenticeship with an Associate's Degree in Financial Management as well as with an official Certificate of Completion of Apprenticeship. For the summer break between the second and the third year of apprenticeship, I planned for possibilities of international exchanges with Swiss banking apprentices.

With this project in my pocket, I went to see approximately ten other presidents of local banks. They were all not only extremely impressed by my Swiss banking background but also enthusiastic about the

project. And then... nothing at all happened for a long time. Nobody got back in touch with me to refine the project, to Americanize it, to go about setting up curricula, to select apprentices and to hire them. Nothing. I didn't understand that for a long time. Had I perhaps overwhelmed the bankers with my project that was ready to go? Did the Austin banks maybe need no apprenticeship in banking after all?

Then a group of department heads of Advanced Micro Devices, one of the leading semiconductor manufacturers in the world approached me and asked whether I could help them with the realization of three types of apprenticeships. They had realized that they would have a continuous future need for employees who are responsible for the purity of the water which is required for production (ultra pure water technicians). Furthermore, they needed staff members to install ultra pure pipe connections (ultra high purity piping technicians) and specialists for temperature control and instrumentation (instrumentation & controls technicians). They mentioned that they had thought of four-year apprenticeships which would combine 50% school (community college) with

50% learning on the job, which would begin after high school and would lead to an Associate's Degree. Bingo, here was my chance to help develop genuine apprenticeships. And in the meantime, these projects have come so far that we will begin to select the first group of apprentices next year. I am very happy about that.

Meanwhile, I have discovered that the banks have kind of a cast system. For the so-called entry level positions (like tellers and telephone operators, the people in direct contact with the customer!!!), which are paid extremely badly, they hire unskilled persons. For office and management positions, only people with at least a Bachelor's Degree are employed. For me, a rather crazy world.

What have I learned from these two examples?

There are three groups of employers in the USA. The first and today still largest group is just complaining about the schools failing to do their job not producing the workers that they could hire for their organizations. Accordingly larger firms have set up gigantic internal training departments with corresponding budgets and about which they complain. Interestingly enough, however, I have never seen a country, where learning and school were so much considered a unity and that has large difficulties to accept other learning environments than the school - e.g. the worksite. I call this group 'stage one'.

The second group (stage two) has recognized that they must help the schools to educate the youth of the US more successfully. They therefore support the schools wherever they can: with speakers, computers, presents, industry tours, summer jobs and also with money. The schools are grateful and try to prepare their students better for a career as far as that is at all possible in a school environment. Thank God, this group is rather large here in Austin.

The third and at this point smallest group are those organizations which have recognized that they need to take over the responsibility for the work-focused education of American youth and must work together with the schools to achieve that. Just like the companies along with the vocational training schools do in Switzerland. Banks are rather part of the first or second group; the semiconductor manufacturers have begun to switch to the stage three group because they are under pressure because of the scarcity at qualified staff members which prevents still higher profits.

I travel around a lot in the USA to speak at conferences and lead workshops. Based on my experiences in Austin I recommend to consider the following criteria when they select potential partners for initial Apprenticeship experiments in new areas:

1. The company or industry must be in a worldwide competitive market based on quality. If no better quality is available there is no motivation for an often more expensive however solid and future

oriented workforce development.

2. It is not enough if an industry grows. The decision-makers in the companies must painfully experience an actual shortage of labor every day; a shortage of labor which makes it impossible for additional orders to be accepted and, therefore, additional profit to be made.

3. Altogether the company must be financially strong enough to be able to support a change of the educational system. For some years this means to fill and pay for actual positions while the apprentices are still in education - a costly game.

How about our objectives?

- In the summer 1995 two hundred youths found mostly structured, paid summer jobs for two to three months through the Capital Areas Training Foundation. Nobody has started an Apprenticeship, however. Too bad.
- We do not only work with semiconductor manufacturers but also with hotels, restaurants, travel agencies and retail businesses on Apprenticeships which let us hope that two hundred apprentices will begin in the next summer.
- Five of the initially thirteen Austinites who

have started a skilled Apprenticeship in Koblenz/Germany at the beginning of the year are back in Austin. The other eight, however, will most probably not only finish their Apprenticeships successfully, but can also be really proud of themselves to have

mastered a major challenge in life.

- At this point I primarily educate people in other states of the US. I already was in Georgia, South Carolina, Hawaii, Washington D.C., Mississippi, Kentucky, Missouri and Florida. The

in-house education of the CATF staff members is planned for this winter.

Talking about winters: On Saturday, October 28, we went to a Halloween party at a friends' garden - with most of the guests in shorts!

Comparison between Swiss and US Degree Levels in Occupations

Approx Age	USA	Switzerland (nach Dubs)
22/23	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Baccalaureate Degree of Applied Science</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Fachhochschulabschluss (Colleges of Applied Science)
20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Associate Degree of Applied Science 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Berufsmaturität*
19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Certificate of Applied Science 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Certificate of Competence (Lehrabschluss)
18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● High School Graduation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>(e.g. diploma of a private vocational School or a two year apprenticeship)</i>
16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>(end of mandatory school years)</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Schulabschluss

* the ‚Berufsmaturität‘ is the prerequisite to continue studies at colleges of Applied Science (Fachhochschulen)