

The Maverick Minute:

Beth Whited

Description:

In this Maverick Minute, Chancellor Jeffrey P. Gold, M.D., chats with Beth Whited, Union Pacific Executive Vice President and Chief Human Resource Officer, about the Career Currency Program. The initiative is a new corporate partnership that will allow Union Pacific employees to register for fall courses at UNO without out-of-pocket tuition costs, differing from traditional employer reimbursement programs that require students to pay for classes up-front.

Transcript:

Hello, I'm Jeff Gold, and thank you so much for joining us today on this Maverick Minute. We have a very special guest here at UNO, and that's Ms. Beth Whited. And Beth is the Executive Vice President and Chief Human Resource Officer for Union Pacific Railroad, is that right? Did I get that right?

That is correct. That's right.

And we were talking earlier and you said you've been with the Railroad for more than thirty years.

It's true. I look much younger, but yes.

You do. I mean, you must have started as just a –

Toddler.

As a toddler. Right. Absolutely. Well, I wanted to talk to you a little bit about the Career Currency Program today, and I know some of our faculty and staff and students have heard about it. But I remember the first time we met, which was a while ago, and we started talking about how we could jointly create a program that would help our corporations in the community, particularly, in this case, Union Pacific, recruit and retain the best and the brightest, provide career advancement opportunities. And I know you and the team have worked really hard on that, and now it's a reality, right?

Yeah, it's wonderful. We are very excited to be able to provide this for our employees. You know, we have about 35,000 employees across 23 states. You guys have a wonderful online program, so people can get a business degree if they so choose, or any other degree for that matter. But we're thrilled to be able to offer a really high-quality educational opportunity basically for free to our employees.

And this was announced, I believe, internally about two weeks ago if I'm not mistaken.

That's correct.

And I learned just recently we've had over 700 of the UP employees express interest. I mean, I'm sure you're thrilled about that. Maybe you can tell us about some of the feedback that you've had from some of the UP employees.

Yeah, you know, we have something internal called UP Online. So when we make big announcements, they go out on UP Online. As soon as that went live, all of us that were involved started getting emails from employees about how excited they were. People who either wanted to get an MBA or maybe they had never had an opportunity to finish an undergraduate degree. But just earlier this week I had a young man in our Critical Call Dispatching Center send me an email that said, "I can't thank you and everybody who was involved in this enough. This is going to be an opportunity for me to go get my emergency management degree. I've already been accepted at UNO." So you guys are doing a great job, too, because you're –

Well, it's concierge service all the way.

You're getting those people through very quickly.

We have a great enrollment management team, and I'm incredibly proud of all of their hard work. So, you know, I was just looking at some of the statistics, and I don't know how much of them you've been monitoring, but it's about fifty percent undergrad, fifty percent grad interest levels, most for the fall semester, and almost all for online or remote courses. Very few are interested in sitting in a classroom or having what I would call a hands-on experience. Interestingly, about half are in the College of Business (Administration), about another quarter on top of that are in IS&T, cybersecurity, and things of that nature. And then the other quarter are just all over; everything from music to arts to journalism to creative writing to math, English, et cetera. It's really been a very interesting spectrum of individuals.

One of the things I'm proud of is that we really don't prescribe a degree outcome for people. We just say, if it's interesting to you and it furthers your education, we're supportive of that. And I think it's exciting that we have people who want to do music or creative writing. I wish I were a creative writer myself.

Well, I think through your hard work you've created a fabulous program, and I just want to take an opportunity to thank you, to thank Lance Fritz, the Chief Executive of UP. Because, you know, Lance was intimately involved in the creation of Blueprint Nebraska. And as part of that process, we were very involved together on trying to answer the question of what could be done to maintain and grow the workforce here in Nebraska for our local companies. And I'm really proud that UNO can partner with Union Pacific to do this, and to hopefully incite and inspire others in the community to develop similar relationships.

I hope so. I think it's going to be a phenomenal recruiting tool for us. If we're on campus anywhere or as we're hiring for positions that don't necessarily require a degree, for us to be able to say, "Come to Omaha. Join Union Pacific. You can get your master's degree for free at this wonderful institution or you can get an undergraduate degree. And if your career stays at Union Pacific, that's wonderful. If that takes you in another direction with your music or creative writing degree, that's great, too.

Well, I'm sure you appreciate the musicians and the creative writers at UP.

I do.

Well, Beth, I wanted to thank you personally. It's been a great journey so far, but the best is yet to come.

Yeah. We're very excited and thank you so much for the partnership. It was your kernel of an idea and I like to think that we worked with Sacha (Kopp) and yourself and came up with something special.

It is really special. Thanks for being with us today. And thank you for being with us today on this very special Mav Minute.