

Guild

Introducing
the Opportunity
Employer:
A revolution in
equitable talent
development



Table of contents

The broken system – and a new path forward	03
<hr/>	
What is an Opportunity Employer?	04
<hr/>	
HR blind spots: The hidden barriers every employer needs to tackle	06
<hr/>	
Opportunity Employer spotlight: The virtuous cycle of opportunity	11
<hr/>	
Next steps	13



The broken system – and a new path forward

Most employers today have some type of strategy in place around workforce development.

Popular workforce development efforts might include:

- In-house training or internal academies
- Education benefits
- Skilling platforms and programs
- Content partnerships
- Or all of the above

Unfortunately, too many leaders **view these programs as cost centers instead of strategic investments.**

And here's why: They don't have **meaningful ROI** to show for them.

In addition, workforce development programs are typically **not designed with the entire workforce in mind**, riddled with **hidden barriers** that stunt:

- Equitable growth
- Cultures of opportunity
- Innovation

This is the key: A better talent development strategy means a better company strategy – period.

There's a better way forward.

It's the Opportunity Employer framework.

What is an Opportunity Employer?

An Opportunity Employer is an organization that offers equitable, accessible education and career growth opportunities for their entire workforce by **removing commonly overlooked obstacles to growth**, particularly for the workers who need it most: **America's frontline**.

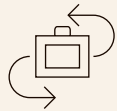
Opportunity Employers see the business impact of their investment in education, skilling, and the creation of highly visible career pathways.

What does this look like practically?

It looks like:



Longer tenures



Higher employee engagement



More promotions and role changes



A new wave of employee evangelism

Take Guild member Sherry Reese, for example.

If we take a look at her LinkedIn, here's what we'll see.



Sherry Reese • 2nd

+ Follow ...

Change the World, 1 person & 1 day @ a time
1yr • Edited •

#TysonStrong A few of you seen my video over at **#TysonFoods** about our free education through **#GuildEducation** and this is how my holiday weekend went.....I graduated high school at age 48 and enrolled in college, I start in January. Let me tell the world you are never too old to go back to school and I'm super Duper excited to start another journey in my life! **#TeamTyson #education** any of my Tyson family from any plant if you would like help enrolling in guild please let me know I'm happy to help! High school, college, certificate or even English language learning!!! I'm always here to help!! **#pennfoster**



When employers remove barriers to growth, then employees start learning, start growing — and start talking about it on their networks.

Experience

Tyson Foods

4 years 6 months

Enid, Oklahoma, United States

Machine operator

Full-time

Jul 2019 - Oct 2020

1 year 4 months

Medical assistant

Oct 2020 - Aug 2021

11 months

Orientation trainer

Full-time

Aug 2021 - Nov 2022

1 year 4 months

Parts room buyer

Full-time

Nov 2022 - Feb 2023

4 months

Production supervisor

Full-time

Feb 2023 - Present

11 months

On-site

HR blind spots: The 8 hidden barriers every employer needs to tackle

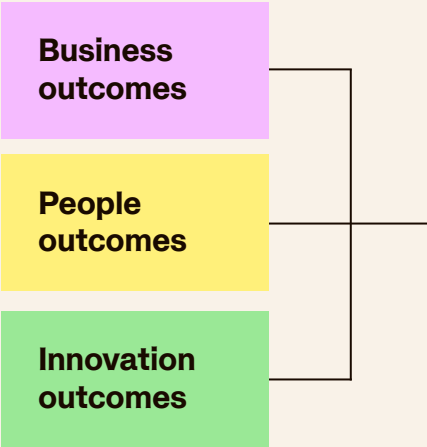
Becoming an Opportunity Employer means doing things differently.

Let's take a look under the hood.

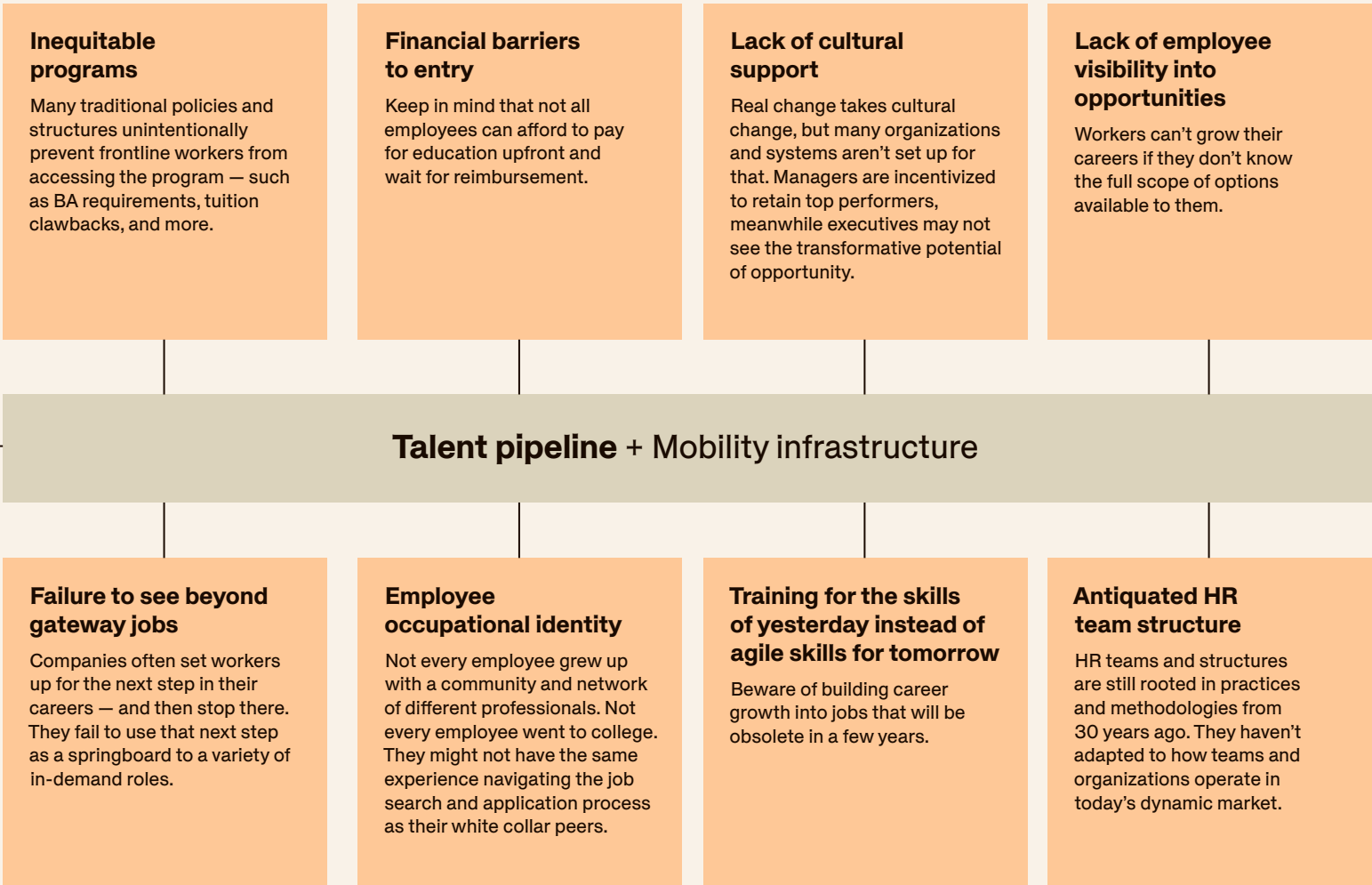
We have to start by **identifying and dismantling the systemic barriers to career growth** that many don't even realize are there.

Here are the eight most common obstacles to growth.

8 blockers that prevent well-intentioned programs from driving the outcomes — and ROI — needed for people, business, and innovation.



These barriers are common byproducts of the standard talent development model. They're systemic — and will take a systemic approach to bypass them.





In our work with Fortune 1000 companies across the U.S., we've seen how innovators flip the status quo on its head and dismantle these obstacles.

01: Unintentionally inequitable programs

Tuition reimbursement has been a hallmark of employee development programs since the U.S. government launched the \$5,250 tax-free education benefit in the 1980s.

And while the widespread adoption of tuition reimbursement was initially a step in the right direction, it's no secret that these programs have **always favored white collar workers** for several reasons:



Education: Certain education levels (e.g. bachelor's degree) are often required in order to be eligible for tuition reimbursement.



Finances: Workers must be able to confidently pay for their education out-of-pocket before receiving reimbursement.



Time: Time is a commodity. White-collar workers typically have more flexibility, which is necessary for employees to partake in education programs.

Additionally, there are often strings attached to participation, like:

- Manager approval
- GPA requirements
- Tuition clawbacks

All of these policies raise the barrier to entry, particularly for frontline workers.

02: Financial barriers to entry

If employees can't afford to front the money for tuition in the first place, they're obliged to take on student loan debt — adding to the already **astronomical crisis** affecting millions of Americans.

And considering

4 in 10 Americans

can't cover a \$400 emergency expense,

there's a considerable percentage of your workforce that can't access the learning needed to grow their careers without taking on debt.

03: Lack of cultural support and buy in

Even when executives believe that people are their biggest asset, not all of them prioritize career growth — particularly when it comes to the oft-overlooked frontline workforce.

An investment in real talent mobility can be a significant cultural shift — and it takes significant buy-in from the top to make it a part of a company's overall strategy.

But it's not just the C-suite that can be a barrier. Managers may refrain from encouraging career growth to retain their best workers. The system does not incentivize them to foster mobility in the first place.

“The real unlock came for us in 2019 when we opened up the fully funded tuition program. This was where we opened it up so that our employees could access business and technology degrees — and we further expanded it into culinary, hospitality, agriculture degrees — that allowed them to pursue that advanced education in a fully funded tuition model.”

Daniel Banks

Director of Global Benefits

Chipotle

“When I think about talent mobility and the way we define it at Target, which is ... providing access for people to take control of their career experiences and dream big and aspire to do more, it was really, really important that we did three things: Number one, we provided visibility to those opportunities. So *making sure that every team member, no matter who you are, what function you sit in, has visibility to the roles that are available and how you could pursue them.*”

Kiera Fernandez

EVP and Chief Community Impact and Equity Officer
Target

04: Lack of employee visibility into career growth opportunities

Even if a career growth program is structured equitably and supported by company leadership, it can't drive mobility if employees don't know about it.

That doesn't just mean intentionally and broadly marketing the program, though that is certainly a big part of it.

It also means helping employees see what's possible for themselves, both at their company and beyond. Even if they do, they might not believe a new role in a new field is within reach.

05: Failure to see beyond gateway jobs

Career growth and development isn't a linear progression. But when many employers think of workforce development, they think of helping employees take the next step — and then stop there.

That creates plenty of managers, but it doesn't unlock an individual's full talent potential. It doesn't account for roles that can help employees springboard into even more meaningful, lucrative, or in-demand jobs.

As for employers, it creates a talent bottleneck. Employees are able to move into what we call gateway jobs but not beyond — even as companies struggle to hire the higher level skills they need.

06: Employee occupational identity



Not every employee grew up with a personal community that exposed them to different professions and career paths. Not every employee went to college. Not every employee has experience with the job search and application process.

All of these considerations — often taken for granted by white collar workers who grew up with built-in experiences and networks — inform an individual's occupational identity, as we outline in [this blog](#).

When organizational leaders don't intentionally foster and develop occupational identity through mentorship, job crafting, and more, they limit the career growth options for a large part of their workforce.

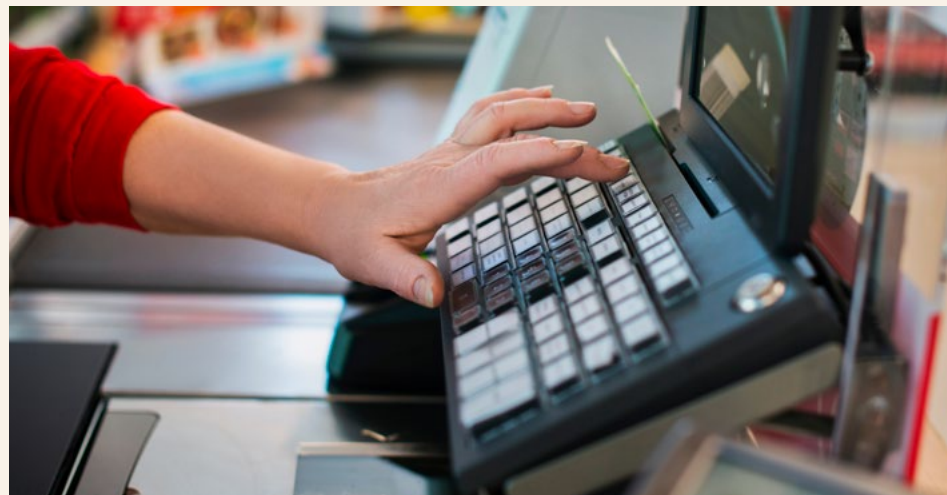


07: Training for skills of yesterday vs. agile skills for tomorrow

Beware of creating career mobility into dead-end jobs. Leading organizations are finding that to have the right people with the right skills at the right time, you have to think ahead.

While you shouldn't neglect talent shortages today, many workforce development plans fail to account for skills that support where the business is heading in the future.

Even considering that we can't really predict the future, learning is its own skill — one of the more important ones to instill in organizational culture. Failing to do so can hurt agility and innovation as workforce knowledge runs the risk of stagnating in the face of rapid technological change.



08: Antiquated HR team structure

HR teams and structures are still rooted in practices and methodologies from 30 years ago. Benefits are often considered a box to check — and are largely viewed as a cost center. But the businesses and teams HR supports are drastically different today. The world is different, and most HR departments have not kept pace.



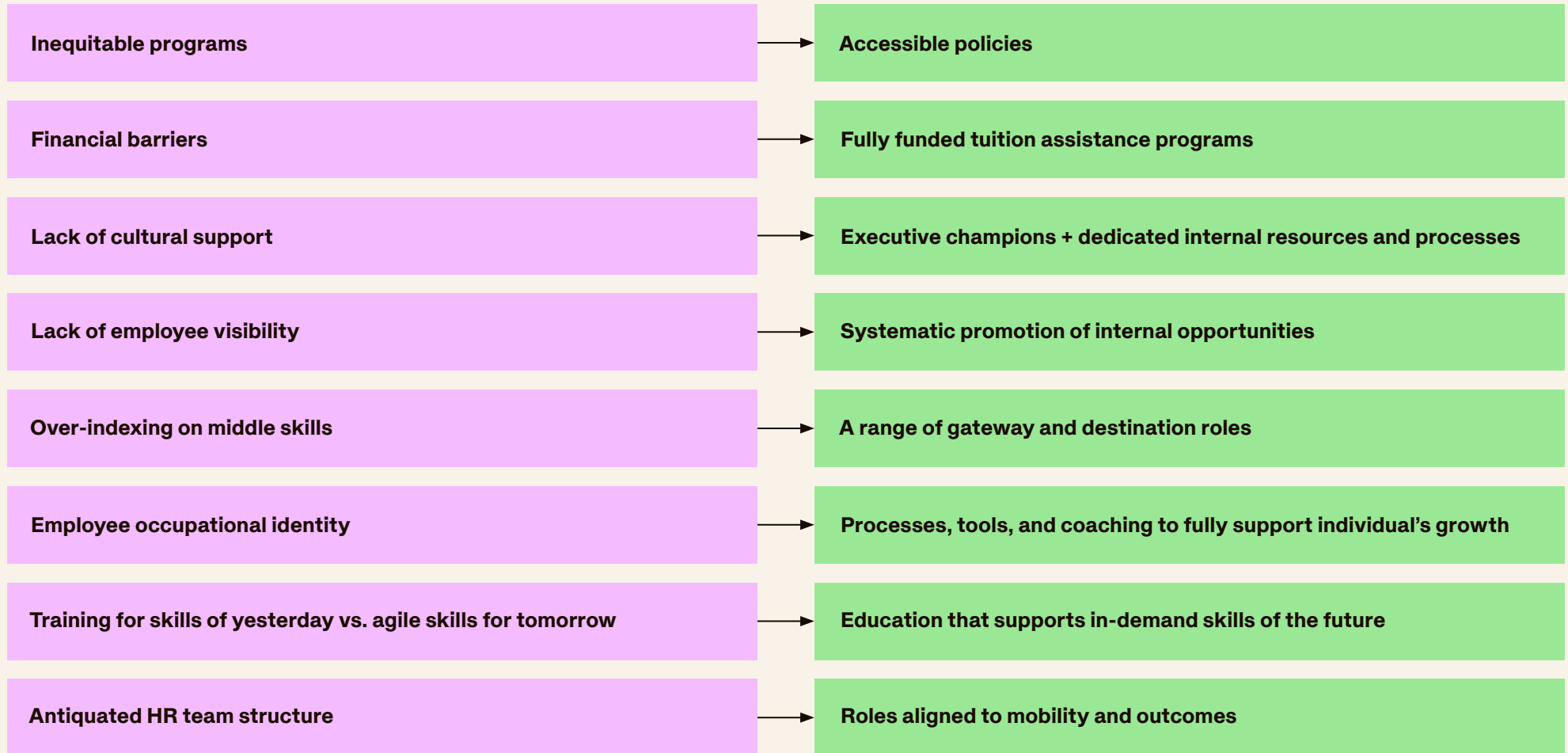
The metrics HR tracks also tend not to measure real mobility or opportunity. Employee engagement is important, but it doesn't necessarily point to opportunity created. Likewise, program and benefit usage doesn't tell you whether individuals are moving into new roles or changing fields entirely.

“One of the things that literally keeps us up at night in the HR practice, there's this tension between the now and the future. We are in a situation where we have 9.8 million open jobs in America. So the business leaders are saying, I need you to fill the open positions now. And at the same time, we have to think about the future. What are we going to do to ensure that we have ample qualified, diverse, and inclusive workforces in the future?”

Johnny C. Taylor Jr.
President & CEO of SHRM

The answer: The Opportunity Employer model

Opportunity Employers do things differently.
They remove these common barriers and move from:



So where are the employers using this model today?
And what results are they seeing?



How the retailer cultivates a culture of opportunity

**3 Step Approach to
Creating Career
Opportunity for
Employees |
Ft. Target**

"We're not relying on what has been a "tap the shoulder" mentality of opportunity. It's systematic, which creates growth opportunities for everyone."

Kiera Fernandez, EVP and Chief Community Impact and Equity Officer, Target

For Vaden, the program gave him the confidence and tools to be his best self — and get a promotion.

70% lower turnover for hourly associates who participate in the program than those that don't, and promotions are 3x higher for the same group.

**Opportunity
Employers:
Guild x Target**



How opportunity supports growth for the fast casual brand

**How Chipotle Uses
Upskilling to Fuel
Business Growth**

"The real unlock came for us in 2019 when we opened up the fully funded tuition program...That resonated with individuals, the ability to go back to school, pursue something that they were interested in, in a completely tuition debt-free environment."

Daniel Banks, Director of Global Benefits, Chipotle

Logan dreamt of getting his degree — but even saving through high school wasn't enough. Then he heard about Chipotle's fully funded education program — and applied immediately.

**Opportunity
Employers:
Guild x Chipotle**



**See how Tyson
Foods provides
equity and
opportunity
through learning
and career growth**

"We were at a stage where we wanted to do a deep investment in how we help people grow and have opportunities within the company."

Olivia Walsh, VP Talent and Culture, Tyson Foods

Without a diploma, Sherry felt stuck. But thanks to Tyson Foods, she finished high school, got promoted, and is on the path to college.

**Opportunity
Employers:
Guild x Tyson
Foods**

Next steps

Want to learn more about becoming an Opportunity Employer?
Or eager to get started?

**Check out these resources on building talent strategy,
championing career mobility, navigating HR trends, and beyond.**



Champion's toolkit

[Learn more](#)



Career mobility workbook

[Learn more](#)



2024 HR trends and insights report

[Learn more](#)

Guild

guild.com

