

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

You're listening to Work in Progress. I'm Ramona Schindelheim, editor-in-chief of WorkingNation. Work in Progress explores the rapidly changing workplace, through conversations with innovators, educators, and decision-makers, people with solutions to today's workforce challenges.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

OneTen is a coalition of leading corporate executives, who are committed to up-skilling, hiring, advancing 1 million black Americans over the next 10 years. Joining me to discuss the initiative is Maurice Jones, the CEO of OneTen. Maurice, thank you for joining me.

Maurice Jones, OneTen CEO:

Thank you for having me.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

So, Maurice, why don't you tell us a little bit about OneTen?

Maurice Jones, OneTen CEO:

We are a coalition of, now, 53 companies from all over the country, committed to hiring and advancing a million black talent, who don't yet have four-year degrees, into family-sustaining careers, over the next 10 years. So what that means is, companies are putting jobs on the table, first and foremost, for the purposes of this OneTen journey. And those jobs, just to break them down, are jobs that have to pay a living wage - we use the MIT living wage calculator to determine what that is - in various metropolitan areas across the country. Secondly, the jobs cannot require a four-year degree for one to be competitive. Thirdly, the jobs have to have a low, low, low risk of automation, so they're going to be around. And then lastly, the jobs cannot require more than five years of experience, from the prospect, in order for that candidate to be competitive. Any jobs that have those four characteristics are jobs that we're committing for this journey.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

Have you identified any of those jobs, any areas in which people might be looking and where you're concentrating?

Maurice Jones, OneTen CEO:

Sure. I mean, those jobs are in IT. Those jobs are in HR. Those jobs are in finance. Those jobs are in a factory. Those jobs are across the board. Sales is another area. The beautiful thing about this is, there's no one occupation that has a monopoly over jobs with these characteristics. And that's part of the point we're trying to make here, is let's put quality jobs on the table, and let's do it across industries and across job occupations. The second piece of this, by the way, is that the companies are, in addition to putting those jobs on the table that are already meeting these characteristics, they are looking at all of their jobs and, they are removing the invisible, invisible barriers to access to those jobs for the folks we're talking about. And the main component of that, is removing that four-year degree requirement, where it's not really related to doing the job, moving in essence to a skills-based hiring and advancing paradigm.

Maurice Jones, OneTen CEO:

That's a real big piece of this. The third piece of this, I was going to mention, that the companies are committing to, is to become a community of practice, a community of practice in which they are learning from one another, sharing with one another, pushing one another, holding one another accountable, and collectively taking action. And that's, with respect to how to be great at skills first hire, how to use apprenticeships, for example, as a vehicle for skilling and developing and hiring more diverse talent, how to create career pathways for individuals coming into your enterprise, as opposed to the risk of dead end jobs, how to really do well with respect to up-skilling and re-skilling, those are the kinds of things that we are attempting to scale and perfect within this community of practice, to impact the members of the OneTen coalition and the corporate community more generally.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

Statistics that are on your website caught my attention, that about 75% of black job seekers, between the ages of 18 and 50, don't have that four-year degree, but 61% of middle-skill jobs, those jobs that you were just talking about in IT, healthcare tech, require that college degree. So, that really truly is a barrier.

Maurice Jones, OneTen CEO:

If you look at the job market today, when you look at jobs that pay \$60,000 and above, 79% of those jobs across the country today, on paper, require a four-year degree. If you look at jobs that pay \$40,000 and above, 71% of those on paper, require a four-year degree. And yet, if you look at the workforce across the country, 66% of the workforce does not have a four-year degree, and 76% of black talent does not have a four-year degree. So yes, this is a major barrier to folks catapulting into the middle class. And so, this is why we are focused on this. This is an area that we definitely have to attack in order to make a more perfect view.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

When you talk to these corporate leaders, has there been any discussion on why they have been required in the past? And if there is value in a four-year degree at all?

Maurice Jones, OneTen CEO:

There are some jobs that absolutely require four-year degrees, absolutely require master's degrees, absolutely, in some cases, require PhDs. The challenge is, we have become, as a country, a credentials-based economy, right? A credentials-based political economy, and the corporate community adopted that, just like the rest of us. Think about what the country has been doing and saying for the last generation, "Hey, got to get that four-year degree. Got to get that four-year degree. Got to get that four-year degree.", and not recognizing that, no, we need multiple pathways for folks to achieve the American dream. The four-year degree is one, but it's not one that's feasible, practical for everybody, because of cost, because of a life journey, because of other responsibilities.

Maurice Jones, OneTen CEO:

And, it may be one that people get over the course of a lifetime and not necessarily have it by 21. This is a self-inflicted wound, but it's a self-inflicted wound that we, as a society, have imposed on ourselves. So, the corporate community reflects the country at large, and this notion of the four-year degree being the ticket to the American dream is something that we embraced across the board. And we are seeing the consequences of it, certainly with respect to the incredible inequities and disparities and wealth and health and power that you see in our country today.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

That's a really good point too, that we like to make at WorkingNation, is that everybody's life is different. You may be able to go to a four-year school right after college, but you may have other life responsibilities that keep you from doing that. And you may not be able to go there until you're 25 or 30 or 40. The idea that you have to, to be able to get this middle-class life is, one that I agree with you, is totally antiquated and it's time to rethink it. And I think a lot of people are, including, as you were saying, your group.

Maurice Jones, OneTen CEO:

I think that's right. The American promise is, no matter where you start, you can be president one day, right? No matter where you start, that's the American promise. And if we say, "Well, actually, let's put a little caveat in it. You have to go through a four-year degree, and you've got to do it before you're 21." No, that's not what we are about. That's not who we are. That's not who we were promising to be, and somehow, somewhere, we started creating one pathway to success. And so, what you see us doing now is, you see us saying, "No, that's not right. There should be multiple pathways to the dream that you have." This corporate coalition is coming together in saying, "Yep, we're going to do everything that we can to ensure there are multiple pathways." That's what attracted me to this coalition.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

Has there been any practical ideas put into place yet? Are you still forming those? Because I know you're fairly new.

Maurice Jones, OneTen CEO:

We are, although we've got companies in the coalition who have been perfecting skills-first hiring for years, right? We've got companies like Accenture who, four years ago, had over 80% of their jobs requiring a four-year degree, and through hard work, starting with the leadership of the CEO and the CHROs and hiring managers and others, today they're at 48%. 48% of their jobs. This is one of the global brands and professional services. We are building on progress that companies actually have had. And what we're now trying to do is to scale it, is to make it pervasive and to come bring together the power of this coalition to do so.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

I think part of what you're saying too, is it's about advancing in career. So, it's one thing to get people in the door, but there has to be ways to advance that talent as well. Grow, retain, promote.

Maurice Jones, OneTen CEO:

That's right. Hiring is only one component. Once one is hired, you want, first of all, continued skilling and up-skilling and re-skilling. You want sponsorship. You want mentorship. You want promotions. You want a comment in which folks feel like they belong and feel like you believe in them. That is work to be done and work that this coalition is coming together to do.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

I see that Year Up has been named talent developer for OneTen. How are you guys working together? How are they helping this cause?

Maurice Jones, OneTen CEO:

What we're building is an ecosystem, an ecosystem that starts with those jobs translated into skills that we talked about. And that is sending a signal to the talent developers component of this ecosystem, to say, "Here are the skills and domain. Here is what you should be aligning your offerings to do." And so, Year Up is an example of a talent developer who can take those skill demands, and translate them into talent development boot camps and courses and certifications and licensed preparation for the talent. So they are the folks helping to prepare talent, to be hired, imparting these skills that are in demand by the employer.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

I saw something you had said previously about, it also starts with the employers, the way they identify jobs, the way they list what they are looking for. So, it goes back to that skills-based hiring, because if jobs are just listed as IT worker, if you don't know what you're expected to do, you can't find that pathway. So, are you working with these same organizations, these corporate organizations to change that?

Maurice Jones, OneTen CEO:

Yes. It's part of what we are attempting to work with businesses to do, which is to take position descriptions and change them from prerequisite four-year degree, into [inaudible 00:13:25] specific skills and computer technology that you need, in order to do this job, right? "Here are the frameworks or the programs that you really need to know and to master." That's the whole idea behind the skills-first approach, is to really detail what you're looking for.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

The other thing you also said that I thought was interesting is, this is not just about black Americans. This is about all Americans, that this idea of the skills-based hiring benefits everyone.

Maurice Jones, OneTen CEO:

Absolutely. So look, we know that fixing this issue for black talent will fix this issue for all talent. Well, honestly, that's the American journey. But, to the point that I made earlier, yes, 76% of black talent do not yet have four-year degrees, and 66% of all talent do not yet have four-year degrees. We know that if we make the workplace one that is more equitable and inclusive of black talent without four-year degrees, we're going to impact other talent without four-year degrees, and we're going to benefit promotions and retentions of people of color with four-year degrees, because we will be making the workplace one that is more equitable and inclusive. And so, yeah, our theory of change is we fix it for this cohort, we will be making the workplace more inclusive for all cohorts. That's correct.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

Tell me a little bit about Maurice Jones. What is your background, and how did that attract you to this project?

Maurice Jones, OneTen CEO:

So, look, I'm a country boy, who was raised by grandparents in a town of 1,200 people, in rural Virginia, on a tobacco farm. And my grandfather who was born in 1914, that was able to attend school for six years in a barn. And then, because he was a little colored child, as the country would refer to us then, he

did not have the opportunity to go beyond that. My grandmother lived in "town", and was able to walk to school to the segregated colored school. And she graduated from high school in 11 years. Those two individuals, neither of whom had a four-year degree or an opportunity to pursue a four-year degree because of their color, they transformed my life. They didn't transform my life because of my color, but they didn't have the opportunities because of their color. And so, that's where this comes from for me. To work on OneTen is, in essence, another way that I can say thank you to my grandparents, another way that I can work on behalf of, or try to be of service to folks who were like my grandparents.

Maurice Jones, OneTen CEO:

I grew up with a lot of talent around me, a lot of talent around me. And at the end of the day, I was lucky enough to get a scholarship. And that enabled me to go on to college. There were a lot of folks who weren't as lucky, and they were not able to afford college, and just didn't go. But they were smarter than I was. They had more talent than I did. And frankly, the country missed their genius, because they had only one path that they could pursue in order to fully contribute this genius. And when that four-year path was cut off, it cut off the ability for us to benefit from them. So, this, I know, is about unlocking the genius that the country continues to leave on the sideline, and thus, we are not as great as we could be without them, or with them, I should say.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

We talked about this previously. I totally relate to that, because I grew up... My parents were farmers as well in Arkansas, and the opportunity wasn't there. My dad was a really smart guy and didn't get a chance to go to college, because he didn't have the money, the same thing. I always believe, exactly as you say, that there's talent everywhere. And we just have to be able to bring it into our workforce. And organizations like yours, I applaud it, because it's opening up those doors that we've kept closed for a long time.

Maurice Jones, OneTen CEO:

Well, I thank you, and I will tell you, I've seen... Look, I've been to the East. I've been to the West. I've been in small towns. I've been in big cities. I've been in big metropolitan areas and little communities. There's genius everywhere. What's not present everywhere is opportunity. We're all adversely impacted by this very imbalanced distribution of opportunity. And so, what this movement of OneTen is all about, is attempting to make the opportunity for a family-sustaining job, one that is open to all.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

You have a big rollout coming up in July, just next month. Tell me a little bit about what you're doing.

Maurice Jones, OneTen CEO:

We do, and we're excited about it. We are launching our technology platform in the month of July. By the end of the month of July, we will have 50 plus companies on this technology platform, and we'll have at least a dozen, if not more, talent developers like Year Up, in community college programs on the tech platform, and we'll have black talent on the tech platform. And what it does, what it will do, is essentially, the employers will be able to post jobs on that platform, jobs translated into skills. Talent developers will see those jobs and those skills. And we'll be able to, also on that platform, list the programs that they have that align with imparting those skills that are in demand, that the employers are posting jobs for.

Maurice Jones, OneTen CEO:

In talent, black talent will be able to go up on the platform, create their own skills profile that will be digital on the tech platform, and find jobs that they're interested in, find talent developers who can help them close the gaps in their skills, and compete for those jobs. We will have that ecosystem all online, serving the entire country, in July. And that's part of how we scale what is, right now, a pretty fragmented system.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

If someone wanted to take advantage of that platform, how do they find it?

Maurice Jones, OneTen CEO:

They go up on the oneten.org website. Just Google oneten.org. We will take you to the portal in July. So that's what I would tell you to do.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

Okay. We're going to post that on our website as well, and we will share it when it is live.

Maurice Jones, OneTen CEO:

Thank you.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

So, Maurice, thank you very much for joining me for Work in Progress. I really appreciate your time.

Maurice Jones, OneTen CEO:

My pleasure. Nice to be with you.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

We've been speaking with Maurice Jones, CEO of OneTen. I'm Ramona Schindelheim, editor-in-chief of WorkingNation. Thank you for listening.