



American Infrastructure  
Worcester, Pennsylvania

# A Cornerstone for Learning

**Hard work and informed decisions allow American Infrastructure to construct a foundation for employee success.**

By working “harder and smarter,” American Infrastructure is able to manage the learning and development requirements of its heavy civil construction, mining, and materials company, which employs more than 1,700 workers.

“Building a great place to work means our organization constantly strives to provide employees with career development opportunities to grow, excel, and succeed,” says CEO Ross Myers. “All of these opportunities are available free of charge to every employee.”

Learning and development functions are embedded within operations, delay-free production, human resources,

and safety. Professionals from these areas work collaboratively with AI employees at all levels within the organization and with strategic industry partners. Collectively, this group functions as a de facto learning and development (L&D) team, working together to build and deliver learning and development programs. This structure is highly matrixed, and because of the strong commitment to growing its employees, L&D efforts are aligned and synched across the organization.

Decisions about learning and performance initiatives at AI are made along the intersection points of the matrix and arise from business needs, as revealed through an annual planning process, and from employee needs, that are revealed through an annual opinion survey.

“Learning and development at American Infrastructure is not about quantity, but rather about quality,” emphasizes Jamie Leitch, career development and training manager. Leitch explains that

the continuous learning center, which she heads, is not a physical building or location, but the embodiment of AI’s commitment to a core value—the continuous development of its employees.

As members of the L&D team, Leitch’s department is primarily responsible for ensuring that AI’s programs reflect adult learning and development principles and best practices, and align with business needs. Most offerings are delivered through the continuous learning center’s corporate university.

Lean production principles guide both the company’s operations and L&D program design—assess, act, improve, repeat, and redesign if necessary. “This methodology is part of our culture; it’s how we do business,” Leitch explains. “It really helps from an efficiency standpoint. Our L&D programs take a bit longer than most to roll out, but they are better aligned with need and operations when they do.”

(Standing) Ross Myers, CEO



**“The learning function engages in strategic and collaborative design, delivery, measurement, and improvement of its programs because we feel that this is the best and most thoughtful way to achieve results.”**

**–Jamie Leitch**

Career Development and Training Manager, American Infrastructure

AI leveraged its engineering strengths by developing a few basic templates for learning and performance programs, and vetted them with key stakeholders across the organization. The templates address design, development, and implementation (drawing heavily upon the AD-DIE model), and ensure that assessment data and return-on-investment metrics are built in.

“The templates allow us to spend the majority of our time on selecting our approach and collaboratively customizing our L&D programs,” says Leitch. “They require everyone to make sure that we haven’t missed anything, and allow us to link everything together into a supportive, cohesive design. This in turn makes us better able to achieve support and alignment.”

Most (89 percent) of AI’s employees work out in the field. Even so, 65 percent of AI’s employees have documented individual competencies and individual development plans.

AI cares deeply about employee satisfaction, development, and retention, and depends on an annual employee survey for feedback. As part of its continual employee satisfaction and retention efforts, AI found that it needed to do more to engage and develop high-potential employees.

The human resources department spearheaded this initiative and vetted everything with the L&D team and key stakeholders to develop a plan of action. A two-part solution was created—the Career Development Roadmap, and a mentoring program that pairs high-potential employees with senior leadership.

The Career Development Roadmap contains a menu of development items, such as assessments, coaching, development programs, targeted training, job shadowing, and other options, designed to enhance the employee’s career experience. Managers and mentors received a new tool to assist them in helping these employees create a three- or five-year Roadmap.

Results have been impressive. Retention among high-potential employees is now at 92 percent, and performance ratings for these employees have increased 22 percent over prior years. The company plans to roll out these tools and processes to all employees in the future.

AI offers eight proprietary certification programs, as well as “academies” several times each year that allow workers in the same job category to network and share best practices. All of the organization’s senior executives participate in learning events as instructors or facilitators.

A recent learning initiative with great impact is the company’s Foreman Development Program. AI’s rapid growth, combined with a limited supply of experienced workers, meant that the company found its bench strength for foreman positions was weakening. Prior to 2006, the company had been using an apprenticeship model to train employees for foreman positions, but this exclusively on-the-job training lacked consistency, standards, and metrics.

In late 2006, the field employee recruiting, retention, and development department conducted a needs assessment and gap analysis and worked with the L&D team and key stakeholders to create a new learning and development model for foreman candidates. This model aligned competencies, train-

ing, assessment, and metrics across the organization and was piloted in early 2007. Elements of the program include

- monthly classroom training sessions
- on-the-job training
- experiential assignments
- peer-learning opportunities
- mentoring
- psychometric assessment
- individual learning plans.

Post-graduation, participants are supported with ongoing coaching by their supervisors as they transition into their new roles. They participate in a peer group network that meets three times a year as one of AI’s academies, sharing best practices and support. Sixteen employees completed the program in 2007, and 56 are participating in 2008.

Leitch sees programs such as this as the key to sustaining organizational results. “The learning function engages in strategic and collaborative design, delivery, measurement, and improvement of its programs because we feel that this is the best and most thoughtful way to achieve results,” she explains.

This shared commitment to excellence is guided by AI’s vision, which is incorporated into every organizational process and is the foundation for every decision. As Ross Myers states, “Through working together we will compete successfully with the best, fastest, and safest competitors in the world, build a great place to work, and leave footprints in our industry.” **T+D**



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