

No-Questions-Asked Hiring

For 38 years, Greyston Bakery in Yonkers has been successfully hiring employees without applications, resumes, formal interviews, drug tests, or job references – a business model it calls Open Hiring®.

“It is a radically different approach to hiring, but we see the success,” says Joseph Kenner, president and CEO of the Westchester County-based company known for its scrumptious brownies.



Joe Kenner

This success is measurable. A 2018 analysis of Greyston by the Yale School of Management found that every dollar invested in Open Hiring yields a social return on investment of \$9. Greyston estimates that the economic impact to its local community by bakery hires in the past year is about \$6.4 million annually. And while annual turnover rates in similar industries range from 30 to 70 percent, the bakery turns over only 25 percent of its positions each year.

Greyston, in collaboration with Ty Hookway, president of CleanCraft in Rochester, and funding from the Community Foundation, ESL Charitable Foundation, and others, has helped launch the Greyston Center for Open Hiring of Rochester.

The center, Greyston's first regional Open Hiring hub, is located at 55 Rutter Street in northwest Rochester in space adjacent to Hookway's company and jointly donated by Hookway, CleanCraft, and Buckingham Commercial Cleaning.



Ty Hookway

Introduced to Open Hiring at a conference in 2016, Hookway has used the process to hire his own employees with hopes of influencing other businesses to do the same. "It shows our willingness to be open-minded and give people a chance," he says of his workforce of 350-plus. "This is also a chance to change a lot of lives."

The Open Hiring model is focused on two areas: creating job opportunities for those facing barriers to employment and providing services to enable self-sufficiency. It's about trusting in the potential of individuals who are ready, willing, and able to work.

At Greyston Bakery, people who want to work stop in and put their name on a list. Typically, it takes about six months for that person to be called back for a job. Currently there are more than 300 names on the job list.

"When people come to us and say they want to work, we accept them with no questions asked," Kenner says. "Each of our bakers was rejected through traditional hiring practices; now

they are essential workers driving a successful business.”

Think about it: Does an employer really need to interview candidates for an entry-level job where the company is going to train the new worker anyway?

Kenner believes there are jobs in most companies where Open Hiring could be implemented. “Maybe, it could be your landscaper, someone at your distribution center, or someone in janitorial services. It’s a viable staffing option for any business with entry-level positions where people can learn on the job,” he says.

“Open Hiring isn’t for people trying to climb the ladder, it’s for people who are trying to find a ladder – their first job opportunities,” explains Mubarak Bashir, regional director of the local Center for Open Hiring.



Mubarak Bashir

Another piece of this innovative hiring model is using job/resource coaches – Greyston calls them PathMakers – to help these new employees address barriers that interfere with them bringing their best selves to work.

“A lot of times it’s not even the fact they can’t work. It’s the fact that they have so many issues outside of work,” says Bashir, who previously served as divisional director of workforce development with the Urban League of Rochester.

“They may be facing homelessness. Imagine if you are working 9 to 5 and you don’t know where you will be sleeping at night. It’s going to be very hard to focus on work. If you have kids at home and don’t have proper child care, you need to have someone to help you get child care.”

Businesses don’t always know when their employees are struggling with issues that hurt their work performance. PathMakers can help by conducting supportive service assessments and connecting employers to social service agencies or other resources to solve that worker’s problem. Bashir says PathMakers also can help employees at all levels of an organization.

Once an employee is working, the Open Hiring philosophy also extends to that person’s next step. At Greyston Bakery, for example, after employees have worked for a couple of years, they can move on to higher-paying opportunities with other like-minded employers. In Yonkers that includes a local hospital and housing authority.

These like-minded employers or partners are what Kenner calls Greyston’s “employment ecosystem” that provide bakery employees “the next opportunity to continue to build their credentials, to build their skills, to move up.”

Bashir wants to establish that kind of ecosystem in Rochester. He has spent his first months on the job cold-calling businesses to set up meetings to introduce Open Hiring. “It is a radical change from what employers are doing. So far, I haven’t been turned down when asking to have a conversation.”

To try Open Hiring, Mubarak suggests “maybe just starting with a few positions to see how it works.”

And Kenner wants to be clear: “This is not charity; it’s a business model. It’s not a promise; it’s an opportunity. Open Hiring works when it’s a win-win. Employers have to be willing to say, ‘If you do a good job, I’ll invest in you.’ ”

Companies and individuals interested in Open Hiring should contact Mubarak Bashir at 914.758.7875 or mubarakb@greyston.org.