

Coalition of Nearly 50 Organizations Launches ‘Tear the Paper Ceiling’ Campaign to Raise Awareness Around the 70+ Million Workers in the U.S. Skilled Through Alternative Routes (STARs)

Nonprofits the Ad Council and Opportunity@Work lead landmark partnership of employers, talent developers and nonprofits on behalf of the majority of U.S. workers without a bachelor’s degree

NEW YORK – Today, nonprofit organizations the [Ad Council](#) and [Opportunity@Work](#), alongside nearly 50 national organizations and companies, launched [Tear the Paper Ceiling](#). Announced [at an event co-hosted](#) with [LinkedIn](#), the national public service advertising (PSA) campaign calls on businesses and decision makers to remove the barriers blocking 50% of workers in the U.S. from accessing upward mobility. The [PSAs](#) encourage employers and workers alike to join the movement to tear the “paper ceiling” – the invisible barrier that comes at every turn for workers without a bachelor’s degree.

The multiyear campaign aims to change the narrative around the value and potential of workers who are [Skilled Through Alternative Routes \(STARs\)](#), rather than through a bachelor’s degree. There are more than 70 million STARs in the U.S. who have developed valuable skills through community college, workforce training, bootcamps, certificate programs, military service or on-the-job learning. Currently, the lack of alumni networks, biased algorithms, degree screens, false stereotypes and misperceptions contribute to the paper ceiling, which creates barriers to upward economic mobility for STARs.

The *Tear the Paper Ceiling* PSAs – developed by world-renowned creative agency [Ogilvy](#) – feature the voices and stories of real STARs in various industries and career stages to raise awareness of the skills and capabilities of workers without bachelor’s degrees. One featured STAR is Justin Hutchinson, who planned to enroll in college but went straight to work when his father became ill. He developed his people skills working at a smoothie shop, which he ultimately leveraged to secure a role leading business development for a marketing firm. Another STAR is LaShana Lewis, who had an aptitude for computers but no college degree. She forged her own career path – from driving buses, to becoming a systems engineer, to founding her own consulting business, where she now serves as CEO.

According to [insights from Opportunity@Work](#), Justin and LaShana are among the 4 million STARs already in high-wage roles, while 32 million more STARs have the skills for significantly higher-wage work (72% higher wages on average) based on their current roles. Since the turn of the century, STARs have lost access to [7.4 million higher-wage jobs](#). Despite that loss of access, research has found that there are still STARs still performing in those upwardly mobile roles, which makes it clear that loss isn’t due to STARs’ capabilities – it’s changes in hiring practices that are now screening them out. The paper ceiling has also suppressed STARs’ [earnings for decades](#): over the last 40 years, the wage gap between STARs and workers with bachelor’s degrees has doubled. Adjusted for inflation, STARs now actually earn less on average than they did in 1976.

“College is [a wonderful bridge to opportunity](#) for millions, but it should never be a drawbridge excluding anyone who doesn’t cross it from thriving careers. Millions of STARs have demonstrated the skills to succeed in millions of today’s in-demand jobs and the adaptability to fill the jobs of tomorrow. Our partners in launching this campaign recognize the essential contributions STARs already make to our economy and believe tapping into STARs’ talent will be vital for our companies and communities to prosper in the years ahead,” said Opportunity@Work CEO Byron Auguste. “Tearing the paper ceiling is about bringing in talent based on skills, not degrees; performance, not

pedigree; and inclusion, not exclusion. This collaborative campaign is a critical next step in our mission to create a U.S. labor market where if you can do the job, you can get the job.”

The integrated campaign will appear nationwide across all advertising formats: TV, radio, digital, social media, out-of-home and print. Per the Ad Council’s model, the PSAs will run in placements donated by the media – including Comcast NBCUniversal, Google/YouTube, LinkedIn, Meta, Reddit, and TikTok, among others. Volunteer media agency dentsu will also secure additional donated media support to extend the reach of the campaign.

At [TearThePaperCeiling.org](https://www.TearThePaperCeiling.org), the campaign provides resources for employers to expand their own STARs hiring, and invites STARs to share their own stories. Visitors to the site can also access a suite of tools that includes the "Tear the Paper Ceiling Hiring Playbook for Employers" to help businesses get started with skills-based hiring practices in their organization.

Tear the Paper Ceiling is supported by nearly 50 national organizations ranging from employers to philanthropies and workforce development organizations. Together, this coalition will broaden the impact and reach of the multiyear campaign, and includes:

- Accenture
- Byte Back
- Cara Plus
- Chevron
- Cognizant Foundation
- College Board
- Climb Hire
- Comcast NBCUniversal
- Education Design Lab
- Gap Foundation
- Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation
- General Assembly
- Generation USA
- Goodwill
- Google
- Grads of Life
- Guild
- Hire Heroes USA
- IBM
- IDEO
- James Irvine Foundation
- JFF
- Jobcase
- Lightcast
- LinkedIn
- McKinsey & Company
- Merit America
- Multiverse
- National Fund for Workforce Solutions
- National Skills Coalition
- New Profit
- Northern Virginia Community College
- NPower
- Per Scholas
- SkillUp Coalition
- Social Finance
- SHRM (Society for Human Resource Management)
- SkyHive
- Strada Education Network
- STRIVE
- Tech Impact
- Walmart
- Western Governors University
- Workday
- WorkingNation
- Year Up

“Across America today, millions of workers are unfairly shut out from job opportunities because of misperceptions about their skills and preparedness,” said Ad Council President and CEO Lisa Sherman. “Through the *Tear the Paper Ceiling* campaign, we will change the narrative to celebrate and affirm the skills that STARs can bring to the workforce. Together with our powerful coalition of

partners, our efforts will help more STARs access equitable job opportunities and inspire employers to discover untapped talent.”

Tearing the paper ceiling and developing new strategies to recruit, hire, and support STARs will also play a crucial role in supporting employers’ Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB) efforts. Biases against STARs – which include [erroneously identifying them as low-skill](#) – have for years had a negative impact on diversity in the workforce, as [61% of Black workers](#), [55% of Hispanic workers](#) and 66% of rural workers of all races are STARs. By removing degree screens and intentionally including STARs during the hiring process, employers can take steps toward building a more inclusive workforce while also addressing talent gaps.

“The fact that 70 million workers in the country are not valued adequately by employers today is a massive challenge, but also one that creates profound opportunity to build a better system,” said Devika Bulchandani, Global CEO of Ogilvy. “Ogilvy is thrilled to play a role in helping STARs rip through the paper ceiling, so they can reach their full potential and have a fair chance at economic mobility. This campaign is an example of creativity at its best – helping impact peoples’ lives for the better and strengthen the fabric of our society.”

“I am proud to have my story told in *Tear the Paper Ceiling*. I’ve always prided myself on being a lifelong learner and early in my career had hoped that my performance would speak for itself. But unfortunately, without a college degree, I was overlooked too many times to count,” said STARs Advisory Council Chair LaShana Lewis. “Since becoming successful in tech and as a CEO, I’ve been told I’m one-in-a-million – but I’m actually one of millions. By identifying people like me as STARs, and recognizing the skills we have as opposed to the degrees we don’t, we’re changing the way we view talent in this country. I truly hope that with this campaign, millions more STARs will feel seen like I have and join the movement.”

Today’s news follows [June’s announcement](#) from Opportunity@Work and the Ad Council about the campaign and initial coalition partners. Since June, the *Tear the Paper Ceiling* coalition has grown significantly – with plans for further expansion during the next few years. Organizations, employers, STARs and other individuals can join the movement by visiting [TearThePaperCeiling.org](#) to share their stories, sign a pledge to support STARs and learn more about skills-based hiring practices.

Additional Quotes from *Tear the Paper Ceiling* Members:

Accenture: “At Accenture, our skill-based approach to hiring helps us reach previously untapped talent pools that reflect the rich diversity of our clients and communities. Through the Apprenticeship Program, our learn-and-earn model connects people without four-year degrees to new career pathways in tech, and we share our success with other companies in the Apprenticeship Network. We’re excited to further our impact on creating a more inclusive workforce and fuel our national competitiveness with the Tear the Paper Ceiling campaign.”

– *Kate Clifford, Chief Human Resources Officer of North America, Accenture*

Chevron: “Our partnerships and investments in workforce development and career training will advance and strengthen communities. Chevron is committed to ‘tearing the paper ceiling’ through multiple diversity initiatives, including a commitment to inclusive hiring. Chevron brings industry-wide focus to D&I by leveraging scale and strategic partnerships to drive greater impact. Through our collaboration with Opportunity@Work, we seek to inspire companies to embrace alternative hiring routes for workers who are Skilled Through Alternative Routes (*STARs*). The Paper Ceiling Campaign

seeks to eliminate hiring barriers by shifting the focus to on-the-job learning, or work experience, as an alternative route to build valuable skills. A workforce armed with the skills necessary to succeed in the jobs of tomorrow is important not only to the success of our business, but also to America's ability to compete in the global marketplace."

– Rhonda Morris, Vice President, and Chief Human Resource Officer, Chevron

College Board: "There is so much untapped talent in this country – including many remarkable young people who don't have four-year degrees. Through BigFuture, we are privileged to dialogue with millions of high school students every year about pathways to success in the workforce. We are proud to collaborate with Opportunity@Work and others so that all students can build a big future, even if they don't earn a four-year degree."

– David Coleman, CEO, College Board

Comcast NBCUniversal: "All Americans should have the opportunity to fully participate and excel in our dynamic economy. We're proud to partner with Opportunity@Work so that more skilled workers can access competitive wage-earning jobs through alternative pathways."

– Dalila Wilson-Scott, EVP and Chief Diversity Officer and President, Comcast Corporation

Google: "Google believes everyone deserves the opportunity to reach their full economic potential, without limitation based on education level. Through our Google Career Certificates program, we're providing accessible workforce training for well-paying jobs. And we've created an Employer Consortium of over 150 companies—including Google—that helps program graduates connect with these jobs. We're proud to support Opportunity@Work and to further our shared goal of creating a more inclusive economy."

– Lisa Gevelber, Founder, Grow with Google

Guild: "Workers today are seeking greater opportunity and career mobility from their employers. Right now, far too many are held back from reaching their full potential because of systems and barriers that prevent them from advancing. At Guild, we are focused on meeting workers where they are in their educational and career journeys, and helping talent rise wherever it's found. The Paper Ceiling campaign is critical in doing just that for STARS, and we are proud to be a part of this movement."

– Rachel Romer, CEO & Co-Founder, Guild

IBM: "Outdated and narrow views of credentials are causing otherwise innovative companies to miss out on hiring top talent like STARS. In partnership with Opportunity@Work and the Ad Council, there is an opportunity to create an inclusive future of work. At IBM, we have adopted a skills-first approach through free education programs like IBM SkillsBuild and by removing the four-year degree requirement for 50% of our U.S. job listings. We're excited to build on this success through our partnership, and we encourage other companies to join us."

– Jonathan Adashek, Chief Communications Officer and Senior Vice President, Marketing and Communications, IBM

Jobcase: We built Jobcase to empower workers. We won't truly achieve this mission, unless the Paper Ceiling that our friends at Opportunity@Work have spotlighted is ripped open. Supporting STARS success isn't just aligned with Jobcase's philosophy, it is literally a definition of our business, services, and mission. We are proud to join forces to accelerate change because when STAR workers are truly empowered, everyone benefits. This is not just the right thing to do, it is an imperatively

critical thing to do if our country is to remain the economic leader and the beacon for economic opportunity that we all aspire to be.

– *Fred Goff, CEO and Founder, Jobcase*

LinkedIn: “For far too long, the way people got hired was based solely on the job they had, the degree they earned, or the people they knew. That’s starting to change – and we see it happening on LinkedIn. Employers are realizing that by shifting focus to the actual skills a worker brings to the table, they can solve some of their biggest business challenges and unlock opportunities for millions of overlooked, qualified candidates. In today’s turbulent economic times, the need for new ways of thinking has never been more urgent. LinkedIn is proud to stand with Opportunity @ Work to play a role in tearing down the ‘paper ceiling,’ so that we can create a more equitable and inclusive workforce for all.”

– *Aneesh Raman, Vice President, Head of Opportunity Project, LinkedIn*

McKinsey & Company: “Filling most in-demand jobs today – and tomorrow – will require a fundamentally different approach to finding the potential in talent, rather than screening resumes for a particular pedigree. What employers really need is knowledge, skills, and capacity to learn. We are making significant investments at McKinsey to ensure that our own talent culture is both distinctive and inclusive. To create opportunities for a broader range of talent, we are reaching out to new sources, like coding bootcamps and apprenticeship programs, and adapting our process to include game-based assessments and interview guides that rely less on business jargon and case prep. We are also proud to help tear the ‘Paper Ceiling’ by building data-driven tools that will help employers of all kinds make potential the priority and rethink what it means to be a skilled worker.”

– *Katy George, Senior Partner Chief People Officer, McKinsey & Company*

Strada Education Network: “Even at this moment in which there is an extraordinary gap in the labor market between demand and supply, employers too often miss out on talented job candidates due to rigid degree requirements, while also unwittingly constraining opportunity for millions of individuals. Education after high school represents a vital pathway to a prosperous future. Yet we also believe that employers should value the skills people bring to the table regardless of where they acquired them. We’re proud to support the Opportunity@Work STAR campaign, which has the potential to create opportunities for millions of talented STARs across America.”

– *Stephen Moret, President and CEO, Strada Education Network*

Walmart: “Creating paths of opportunity for everyone depends on a skills-based approach to hiring and advancing workers. Opportunity@ Work and the Ad Council’s Tear the Paper Ceiling campaign highlights the enormous unrealized potential for workers, employers and our economy that will come from reorienting our workforce systems toward skills rather than the way skills have been acquired. We are excited to build on our work with Opportunity@Work and others since we began our Retail Opportunity initiative in 2015 to drive change in the workforce system through our business and philanthropy.”

– *Kathleen McLaughlin, Executive Vice President and Chief Sustainability Officer, Walmart, and President of the Walmart Foundation*

Workday: “At Workday, we believe that skills are a central currency in the changing world of work and a pathway to a more equitable economic future for all. Be it through the way we think about talent, the way we innovate, or via our policy advocacy efforts, we are committed to creating opportunities

