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## Apprentices' Wait is Usually Worthwhile

Carol Kleiman  
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When economic times are tough, the tough get training. And among the luckiest in a slow job market are those who are serving apprenticeships: They are paid while being well-trained—which makes apprenticeships very different from most internships.

“An apprenticeship grows into a career through a program of on-the-job training and formal instruction,” wrote Olivia Crosby in the summer 2002 Occupational Outlook Quarterly, a publication of the U.S. Department of Labor.

“Most formal apprenticeships are registered with the Labor Department, which means they meet government standards of fairness, safety and training... Graduates receive certificates of completion from the Labor Department or an approved state agency.”

Apprentices know they're likely to get jobs in their field because employers usually manage and pay for the structured programs, which might last for several years--- another difference from an internship. Apprenticeships can be relatively brief, such as one year for floral designers. Or they can last as long as 10 years for an engraver.

While there are hundreds of unregistered apprenticeships being offered every day, the federal government recognizes 850 of them, with those for construction and manufacturing workers among the most popular.

Others that top the list include cooks, corrections officers, firefighters, operating engineers, power plant operators, telecommunications technicians, landscapers, customer service representatives and tool-and-die workers.

Serving an apprenticeship works—if you're willing to work. “The advantages is that you don't pay for training, you don't owe money when you complete it, you're working all the while, you go to school to learn things you don't on the job—and you have a skill that no one can take away from you, “ said Kina McAfee, instructor in the apprenticeship training programs of the Chicago and Northeast Illinois District Council of Carpenters in Elk Grove Village.

McAfee, a union carpenter, teaches construction carpentry for the joint apprenticeship and training program funded by construction employers and the International Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners. She has a bachelor of arts degree in political science and urban studies and was working in curriculum development for African American studies at a university in 1984 when she began her apprenticeship program. She completed in 1987.

“I made more money as a carpenter apprentice and learned a marketable skill,” said McAfee, a board member of Chicago Women in Trades. After working as a carpenter, she became an instructor of commercial wall framing for the union in 1992.

“We currently have 30 full-time instructors and 4,300 apprentices who work in construction, learn on the job and go to school for one week four times a year.” She said that apprentices in construction are averaging \$31 an hour. For apprenticeship programs in your area, call America's Workforce Network's free help line at 877-872-5672. And earn while you learn.