

# TALENT LEADERS

## TALKING

### SERIES



## Grant Santos

CEO of Educ8 Training

**How do we maximise the potential of all employers and employees in the Cardiff Capital Region? How can we develop the talent of all age groups? And what part can apprenticeships play in the future skills of Southeast Wales? The Venture 'Talent Leaders Talking' series gets to the very heart of where we stand in terms of the skillsets, employability, opportunities and potential we have in our region - discovering the many dimensions of 'Where Are We?' and 'What's Next?' as we move into the fourth industrial age.**

Grant Santos is CEO of Educ8 Training Group, the award-winning enterprise founded by chairman Colin Tucker in 2004 to address skills shortages across Wales - growing a 200-strong team that is now one of Wales' leading training providers. In this fascinating discussion, we explore how the highly diverse and wide-ranging apprenticeship programmes can build sustainable success for employers and employees alike, in our region and beyond ...

"After 25 years in the apprenticeship space, I can certainly say that these valuable training and development programmes are more prevalent than they were - and becoming more widely recognised for the advantages they bring to both the learner and the employee.

"Here in Wales, we've significantly increased Level 4 and 5 apprenticeships, which are often a stepping-stone to a degree. We've seen new sectors such as Cyber, Fintech and Medtech evolve, helping drive the growth of flexible apprenticeships. And we've welcomed the Welsh Government's emphasis on all-age apprenticeships, and the commitment to the Young Person's Guarantee for 16-24 year olds. Many people don't realise that apprenticeships are for everyone aged 16 and over. They're not just for school leavers - and are perfect pathways for those already in a job role who want to boost their skills and knowledge in a specific area.

"All of that is hugely encouraging - but there's plenty of room for improvement and scope to grow.

"Less than 20% of employers engage in apprenticeships here in the Cardiff Capital Region and - dare I say it - we still have an element of snobbery around an 'Apprenticeship' being somehow of lesser value than a 'Degree'. We simply have to stop thinking that way, not least because you can do both programmes starting as an apprentice and when the time is right for you, progressing towards a degree. There are even many learners who study a degree then upskill with an apprenticeship afterwards. All forms of education are valuable and should be equally celebrated."



## Why the apprenticeship journey is right for so many people

"I started my own career in training on a Level 4 apprenticeship before going on to university. It's more important than ever for people to get the opportunities and the training that's right for them at any particular time. Everyone's pathway in life is different. Everyone's progress is different. And that's why apprenticeships are so right for so many people. They offer a route that allows people to make the journey in a way that suits them best.

"It's difficult to overestimate the value of the learning experience gained through an apprenticeship. Everything is contextualised because you're learning on the job. Everything makes sense because the learning reflects your working reality. It's practical, grounded and fully supported. You're working with experienced people who have 'been there' and are able to pass on their wisdom and expertise in a way that's relevant and useful. You also get paid while you learn, which can't be overlooked given the rising levels of debt, university student loans and spiralling costs of living in our society.

"To make the most of the opportunity we have in our region - to bring as many people as possible into a great learning, earning, working environment - we need to make sure our apprenticeships are as inclusive as possible. We can't afford to expend all our energies on just the higher apprenticeships, at Level 4 and 5. Someone entering industry at Level 2 has every opportunity to be running a team or a department in a few years' time - or simply doing a great job. We need to help people grasp all of those opportunities, at all levels.

"Level 2 Apprenticeships are particularly important to build the talent pipelines we need for Social Care and the Health Sector. These are jobs that bring dignity to millions of people who need care - and very often change the lives of the people who train to do the job. So all of our apprenticeships are as important as each other and it's good to see the Welsh Government commit to creating 125,000 all-age apprenticeships during this Senedd term - a 25% increase. We must keep building the momentum that we're beginning to get behind these game-changing programmes."

## Listening to learners and employers to 'get it right'

"The pandemic catapulted by a number of years our ability to deliver apprenticeships digitally, which is a real positive. But the pandemic also brought to the fore the importance of pastoral care - something we have always been good at. We work in a lot of different sectors and post-lockdown we have embedded some of the tech-enabled practices into our training - but it's clear that a blended approach is vital.

"That human interaction of face-to-face training, one-to-one sessions and group workshops is crucial. So the next few years will be about getting the hybrid blend exactly right: understanding the full capabilities of technology, listening to both our learners and customer organisations about what's best for them. We've always known that one size doesn't fit all - and now we have the opportunity to tailor it for everyone.

"This partner approach of listening and learning is at the heart of how we work with employers. It's a very different conversation to the purely transactional. We understand where their businesses are going, their main challenges for the next 12 months and how we can best support them.

"That means being a genuine learning partner - working with employers in a two-way collaboration, taking away the pain, asking the questions that are fundamental to the success of their organisation. What are the things holding them back? What do they want to get from the programmes? How can we tweak and modify an apprenticeship so that it adds a competitive advantage to them? If we get it right, it's transformational - creating a real value proposition."



## Going from 'Good' to 'Great' through parity of opportunity

"How good can we be if we fully embrace all the possibilities of apprenticeship provision? The potential is almost endless - and the process of realising that potential needs to start at school, with teachers and careers advisers understanding and explaining the full menu of options to be explored by everyone.

"If we do that, then we really are well on the way to becoming the region we want to be in terms of skills and employment."

Thank you Grant for sharing with us your passion and real-world experiences. Look out for our further Talent Leaders Talking features from key figures in our region - and to find out more about the latest in Skills & Talent in Southeast Wales, go to: [www.venturewales.org](http://www.venturewales.org)