

THE EXTRA POINT

BY JERRY ROBERTS



1582 Thoughts About Our Education System

Every business owner or corporate leader is or should be highly concerned over the system of education we have in Guam. Most of the people who will knock on our doors to get a job are going to be a product of it. I'm Jerry Roberts, and today we'll look at reasons why employers need to be concerned and also need to be vocal. That's coming next on The Extra Point.

Americans are almost equally divided over their confidence in higher education, with an increasing number of individuals expressing reduced trust in postsecondary education, according to a recent Gallup survey.

The poll, released Monday, found 36 percent of respondents have a great deal or quite a lot of confidence in higher education; while 32 percent said they have some confidence and 32 percent expressed little to no confidence.

The latest findings mark a significant drop in faith from when Gallup first measured confidence in 2015, when 57 percent had a great deal or quite a lot of confidence and only 10 percent had little or none. This is a massive change of opinion in just nine years.

These are national numbers, and I'm not aware of local surveys that asked the same question. If there was a current poll that dealt with this issue, I can't imagine that the local numbers would be any better.

I'm going to list three factors that workplace leaders should be focused on.

1. Inadequate Workforce Preparation. Many students graduate without the necessary soft skills and qualities, such as communication, collaboration, adaptability, work ethic, and more — all are crucial for success in a more modern workplace.

It wasn't all that long ago that if a graduating senior decided to take a pass on college, he or she was reasonably well prepared to bring some value to an employer. Today, it is less so.

Now, employers find too many job candidates who lack the fundamentals.

Employers are struggling to find qualified talent, hampering their ability to grow, and in some cases to just keep the doors open.

2. Lack of Critical Thinking. Without trying to introduce politics into the conversation, too often educational institutions tell students what to think instead of *how to think*. That does not play well when the individual is on your payroll.

3. Coping Skills Seem to be Missing. I've been harping on this point for the last 20 years. Our kids must receive ongoing life skills training, especially in how to process information and make effective decisions. This will benefit them in all areas of life.

There's something else. These issues and others don't seem to be getting better. For some time, local organizations have seen their employment costs rise, while the overall quality of job applicants has been on the decline.

I don't make this stuff up. If you asked 100 HR managers about their hiring experiences in the last few years, I think their stories would align well with today's conversation.

To be fair, it's not all bad news. There are some very bright kids coming out of the same system. My only worry about them is that a lack of opportunity will force many to leave the island in search of something better.

The overall hope here is that private sector and public sector employers can lead an initiative to work with educators and parents' groups to bring about significant change in Guam's schools.

It's not an impossible task, and it also won't happen overnight. It took time for the system to get to its present state, and it will require time to repair it. (Con't.)

Everybody seeking elected office should be able to discuss Guam's educational issues in depth, and have some opinion of how to move forward. That includes candidates for the offices of mayor, senator, and congress.

It's no longer enough for vote seekers to simply say they're for better education. All of us are for that. I need to know what you plan to do about our problems, if elected.

That's the Extra Point. Be responsible and make something good happen today. For 93.3FM, the Ray Gibson Show, and First Hawaiian Bank, I'm Jerry Roberts.

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