Brewing New Opportunities
STARBUCKS TEAMS UP WITH STRAYER UNIVERSITY TO OFFER EDUCATIONAL PERKS

By Michelle Davis, Writer

Starbucks has long been known for its progressive benefits for eligible employees: health care, even for part-time workers; equity in the form of restricted stock; flexible work hours; and, of course, there’s the coffee.

But in the past year, Starbucks added another perk for its more than 100,000 employees—known internally as “partners”—who work in the United States. Starbucks teamed up with Strayer University to provide employees with the opportunity to further their educational goals both within the company and more broadly.

The goal, says Cindy Demeules, vice president of learning and development for Starbucks, is to help employees grow personally and professionally. “Our partners create the magic—that experience between themselves and the customer and the brand, and that’s invaluable to us,” Demeules says. “We want to help our partners become their personal best. And when you put that aspiration out there, you have to deliver.”

CHOOSING CAREFULLY

To follow through on that promise, Starbucks surveyed employees to determine which benefits they most valued, inquiring about everything from childcare subsidies to aid for transportation. The survey found that 71% of partners preferred educational benefits to other options. With a very diverse workforce, that number was significant, says Demeules, who also leads the company’s education program, Starbucks U. More than half of Starbucks employees are currently enrolled in an educational program, she says, which makes educational benefits a huge focus for them.

Starbucks was selective about determining which higher education institutions to team up with. Strayer University was chosen for its rigorous academics, variety of program offerings and flexibility for working adults. The University
provides credits for select courses that employees take through Starbucks’ in-house educational program, and offers many places for students to learn at 96 Strayer University campuses across the country and online. Employees can also take Strayer University courses, such as introductory business and English for professional communication, exclusively with other Starbucks employees.

“We needed a university that would enter into a true collaboration with us, and not just deliver a one-size-fits-all program,” says Demeules. “The more we are able to support our employees in achieving their personal best in education, the more they are poised to take on bigger and better opportunities at Starbucks.”

That is the case for Maritza Aubourg, a Starbucks store manager in Duluth, Ga., who is pursuing a bachelor’s degree with a concentration in business management, despite long believing that higher education wouldn’t be possible for her.

“I thought I was never going to get the opportunity to attend college again in my lifetime” due to financial constraints, she says. But a scholarship from Starbucks, plus one from Strayer University, added up to make education a reality.

Despite having significant management experience from her 14 years at Starbucks, Aubourg says she often sensed her qualifications weren’t competitive with others. “I’m a high performer at work, but sometimes I felt that not having a higher level of education held me back,” she says. Over the next two years her goal is to graduate and then pursue a master’s degree in management and seek a district manager position within Starbucks, eventually joining the company’s management team.

LIFELONG CUSTOMERS

The educational opportunity has a direct payoff for Starbucks, says Demeules. “People who feel like the company is helping them further their goals stay longer, which is a huge plus,” she says. “And even if they’re not going to stay with us forever, we’re still helping to make them better educated citizens, and hopefully lifelong customers. We’re bettering the world and the communities in which we do business.”

Aubourg says her current educational pursuits translate directly into work skills. “One of the most important concepts I’ve learned and used immediately at work is how to motivate and change behavior,” she says. Calling on theories from her course work that focused on goalsetting, she says she was able to motivate employees by being directive and achievement-oriented. “By rewarding my partners more, I can see a big change in them and in the store performance,” she says.

More than 100 Starbucks employees are already taking advantage of the new opportunity by attending Strayer University. Despite the challenge of balancing work, classes and home responsibilities, Aubourg urges co-workers to make the most of a valuable benefit.

“I would tell partners to stay focused, stay disciplined and put their hearts into it,” Aubourg says. “There are days when managing it all is really challenging, but I learned not to give up and to push myself. Everyone who works for Starbucks should take advantage of this opportunity.”