

Driving the Road to Career Success



Muhammad Hafesji feels incredibly fortunate to have participated in a youth apprenticeship with George Mayfield, a manager of the call centers for travel and member inquiries at [AAA of Western and Central New York](#) (AAA).

The youth apprenticeship was arranged through [CareerWise Greater Buffalo](#), led by [Say Yes Buffalo](#). AAA offers internships for college students as well, but youth apprenticeship enables the company to extend workforce opportunities to high school students.

Hafesji chose a youth apprenticeship with AAA over a couple of other local options because he believed the organization would give him valuable insight into all the components of running a business. And – he loves cars.

A youth apprenticeship is a work-based learning program designed to start when apprentices are high-school age. A proven education and workforce strategy, youth apprenticeship combines paid, structured on-the-job training with related classroom learning. Youth apprenticeship builds a more inclusive economy by creating affordable, reliable, and equitable pathways from high school to good jobs and college degrees.

Youth apprenticeship also creates a talent pipeline for employers that participate, enabling them to train young people who can hit the ground running when they begin working full-time.

Say Yes Buffalo works with the [Partnership to Advance Youth Apprenticeship](#) (PAYA), a multi-year, collaborative initiative that supports states and cities in their efforts to expand access to

high-quality apprenticeship opportunities to high-school-age youth. PAYA believes that youth apprenticeship has the power to transform how our education system prepares young people for careers and adulthood, as it connects the learning needs of youth with the talent needs of industry, creating a more inclusive economy and skilled workforce.

Hafesji loved the youth apprenticeship because he calls himself a “hands-on learner,” and thrives in the workplace rather than in a classroom. “I need to see it in person and do it in person,” he said.

Much of that hands-on learning resulted from Mayfield’s belief in exposing Hafesji to multiple departments at AAA, including marketing. This led Hafesji, currently a first-year student at Villa Maria College in Buffalo, NY, to change his major from business to marketing. Say Yes Buffalo provides funding for his coursework as part of the apprenticeship program. Hafesji aspired to one day own a marketing firm.

“This apprenticeship really gave me time to see what I want to do and weigh my options,” Hafesji said. Mayfield also believed it important to expose young people to interpersonal skills such as time management and communication.

“**Muhammad and I are still in touch and it is great to hear about how he is using what we taught him in other areas of his life. That is very rewarding; it makes me feel good.”** Mayfield said.

Mayfield also emphasized the importance of understanding how skills can be transferable to different industries and areas of life, such as empathy when speaking to customers.

“ Anyone can pick up the phone for a service call. But if you're nice to that person, you're engaging with that person, you're empathizing with that person. Customers appreciate that. These values can't necessarily be taught, but when people learn these qualities at a younger age, you can go further than someone who tries to learn those skills later in life,” Mayfield said. “It's hard to teach an old dog new tricks. It's harder to teach someone who's been in the workforce for much longer how to be empathetic with a customer.”

Hafesji appreciates Mayfield's active mentorship. “Since I met George, I have definitely expanded my vocabulary and learned how to present myself in business meetings,” he said, adding that these skills will stay with him throughout his career. Hafesji said he's also learned effective management styles and techniques from Mayfield. “His management skills are amazing. He's not a micromanager. He speaks with kindness and explains things properly to people,” Hafesji said. “When you're nice to people, it affects their attitude. I've learned from George that treating people with kindness will get you what you need in return.”

Their relationship was a success because Mayfield and AAA created a welcoming and supportive environment. For example, during the month of Ramadan, Hafesji was pleasantly surprised that Mayfield and AAA provided him the time he needed for daily prayers. “It was amazing,” he said.

Hafesji enthusiastically recommends youth apprenticeship to high school students as a way to find a professional direction. “After they graduate high school, most teenagers are lost and don't know what they want to do. A youth apprenticeship gives you experience, shows you how things work as an adult, and it puts money in your pocket,” Hafesji said.

Mayfield said that having a young person in his workplace also allowed for a fresh perspective on AAA's employee training, helping the organization refine and improve its practices. And of course, he's still hoping Hafesji joins the team full-time after college, ready to hit the ground running. Or driving.

