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learning u | boot camp encourages IT pros to stay in town



President and chief information officer Ken Sidon (left) and Paul Apostle, vice president of enterprise technology, development and innovation, developed the IT boot camp at Antares Management Solutions 11 years ago in order to retain talented individuals.

BY HOLLYANNE WETZEL
PHOTO BY LINDA FORD

Supporting local businesses and providing job opportunities in Cleveland is more important than ever during these economic times. Even more important is retaining the extraordinary talent that the success of local businesses has enabled in their backyards.

Antares Management Solutions, headquartered in Strongsville, is doing just that. Antares provides IT outsourcing and managed services, data-center hosting, and technology consulting solutions to small- and medium-sized clients in all industries, including manufacturing, retail, and insurance.

In its early stages, Antares was designed to be creative to prevent a “brain drain” of technology talent from leaving the region. In the process, the Antares IT boot camp was created

11 years ago by Ken Sidon, president and CIO, and Paul Apostle, vice president of enterprise technology, development, and innovation. “It’s a unique program to help keep technology professionals here in Northeast Ohio,” Sidon says. “It offers recent graduates the training needed to transition from an academic setting into our real-world business environment, so it’s a great way to begin a career.”

The importance of the boot camp is to provide new employees with the knowledge and skillsets to become successful and productive Antares technology professionals. It minimizes the impact to IT departments when a new employee is integrated, and boot campers are given the opportunity to develop friendships and an internal network to use as their careers progress.

With this boot camp, you’re never too old to learn. It’s an opportunity for recent graduates of any age who have obtained a degree in management information systems, computer information systems or a similar area of study. There are also some instances when current employees who have completed schooling in one of these areas who wish to become an IT professional are hired as boot campers.

Qualified candidates are screened by human resources, interviewed by IT managers, and hired to join the boot camp program prior to their full-time assignment in their permanent positions. The three-month program includes an intense schedule of in-house training, mentoring, and project-oriented learning. The program incorporates one week per month in the boot campers’ permanent departments and opportunities to work on team projects.

With a retention rate at 94 percent in the last four years, it’s definitely serving its purpose. “Our training is designed to encourage boot campers to explore various technologies and ideas and not to be afraid to fail and try again,” Apostle says. “This combination of training builds the confidence and knowledge boot campers need to be immediate contributors to the company and our clients.”

The support provided to the boot campers is essential in the completion of the program. Boot campers are assigned a mentor from their future departments who guides them through weeklong assignments and offers counsel throughout the program and during their first year of employment.

Upon completion, there are three entry-level positions that are supported by the boot camp curriculum. The Business Solutions Trainee is for those individuals who are interested in IT development, such as programming, analysis, and database services. The Infrastructure Trainee position is for those who are more interested in IT infrastructure support, such as data center, network, and storage management. The Business Analyst Trainee position is for individuals who have a business major and a minor in technology.

“The program is designed to create a foundation upon which young professionals can build their technology skills and experiences,” Apostle says. “It contributes heavily to the success of the company and our clients.” □

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