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From the Pacific Business News:

<https://www.bizjournals.com/pacific/news/2019/03/29/connecting-kids-with-careers.html>

Executive Insight

Connecting kids with careers

Mar 29, 2019, 5:05am HST

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As a high school student being told that she already had to choose a college major, [Julie Morikawa](#) didn't feel fully equipped to make such a big decision.

"Why, when we're in high school and we have very little exposure to the real world, do we need to select our majors?," Morikawa recalled thinking. "It all just seemed a little backward to me."

So, after launching a career in travel and tech — she's held management positions at Expedia and runs her own consultancy company, Full LLC — Morikawa founded a nonprofit in 2011, ClimbHI, to address the issue.

ClimbHI aims to educate students about future career options. Its largest initiative is the LEI program (for lead, expose, inspire), an annual event sponsored by Hawaii Tourism Authority where high schoolers spend a day learning about the hospitality industry through hotel tours and a career fair filled with tourism-related businesses.

"It was striking to me that we really had little connection between our education system and our No. 1 industry in Hawaii, and I wanted to fix that," Morikawa explained.

"I always wanted to make sure that I was doing the right thing for the next generation and for the industry that I love," she added.

The event has grown to include four different events on various islands, attracting more than 1,000 students statewide and 110 businesses. LEI also has spawned a range of related programs including a mentorship initiative for college students and internship opportunities.

This year's LEI events are set to take place in April, and in conjunction with Oahu's LEI on April 8, Morikawa has some big news: ClimbHI is launching a new online platform, the ClimbHI Opportunity Portal, to connect students and educators with businesses. The ClimbHI Opportunity Portal provides a space for businesses — in any industry, not just hospitality — to post internships, jobs, scholarships and events.

"The industry wants to get communication across to the next generation, and the next generation is trying to find opportunities, and the educators are trying to find the right contacts and get the right experiences," Morikawa explained.



EUGENE TANNER

Julie Morikawa, president and CEO of ClimbHI

“With us touching all of these stakeholders, I wanted to launch a new technology platform to be able to link all of these stakeholders together.”

What is the significance of LEI? There are so many different themes that tie into LEI. We work on real-world skills, we work on inspiring them to come into the industry. But I think for me, the one major goal that we try to achieve is giving each of these students the confidence to believe in their dream, regardless if they’re coming into the hospitality industry, to just have that confidence to believe in their dreams, and then providing them with the pathway to achieve those dreams. That is why we introduce them to over 100 people. They now have all of these business cards and all of these people that care about them. If they pick up the phone and ask any one of them a question, they’re going to get an answer and they’re going to get support.

A lot of what you do relies on having industry partners. What is your strategy for relationship building within the industry? It’s a one-to-one relationship. I personally called all of the high schools that are participants, I go out and I visit the schools as much as I can, I reach out to all of the teachers, I personally reach out to all of the businesses and explain the concept. I really just brought together a whole team of people that exude the aloha spirit.

Tell us more about the new online portal. The whole concept is linking everyone up and helping to change the way we go about providing exposure and experiences to our youths and for our businesses to be able to communicate with the next generation. Businesses will be able to load internships, scholarships, jobs and exposure/events. If we’ve got an aging workforce in this specific area, let’s call attention to those jobs. There’s scholarships that people are not aware of that struggle to get applicants. And then you get into internships, and teachers are always saying, there’s no internships for high school students or we’re looking for more internships for college students. There are a lot of opportunities out there that people don’t know about because the businesses don’t know how to get the word out about them ... How do you get the word out about all of this? Through this platform.

Closer Look

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