

"This Program Changed My Life:" McDonald's® First Graduate of the Career Online High School Shares His Story

In March 2015, Juan Garcia became the first graduate of Cengage Learning's Career Online High School, an AdvancED/SACS accredited program offered to eligible McDonald's® employees as part of the company's Archways to Opportunity initiative. Through the program, McDonald's® employees can earn both an accredited high school diploma and career certificate in one of eight high-growth, entry-level career fields. Below, Juan shares his story.

My name is Juan Garcia. I'm a general manager at a McDonald's® in Chatsworth, California. I am proud to say that in March 2015, at 40 years of age, I finally became a high school graduate! I graduated from Career Online High School (COHS)—a program that has changed my life forever. Upon graduating from COHS, I immediately enrolled in college and I expect to earn my Associate of Arts (AA) degree at College for America this month, December 2015. Thanks to COHS, I am now prepared for future opportunities with the experience, knowledge, and education I need.

While I have always been dedicated to improving myself through education, when I was younger I had to put my education on hold. I attended a university in Mexico, where I'm from, but when I tried to complete my degree after moving to the United States, I found out that my schooling was not considered valid. My only option at the time was to earn a GED in order to enroll in college, but I had a hard time attending face-to-face classes required for the GED while balancing work, my home life, and being a father to my son. Instead, I focused on my career at McDonald's®. I started in maintenance and worked my way up. I did everything—cashier, cook, crew trainer, floor supervisor, 2nd assistant, 1st assistant—and finally I was promoted to store manager. When McDonald's® announced the COHS scholarship program, I jumped on the opportunity and never looked back. I enrolled in the Food and Hospitality career certificate, which taught me a lot I could use immediately at work—about food safety, people skills, and customer satisfaction. Because of the program I am not only a better manager but also a better person. I feel more confident, secure, and accomplished.

I highly recommend COHS. If anyone is facing challenges completing their education due to their schedule, family, or any other circumstances, COHS makes things easier. It is so convenient with the added flexibility of being able to access the program online at anytime. You can study at your own pace. And it is accredited, which was important to me after my experience of not being able to start college because my diploma wasn't considered valid.

And there was so much support! The academic coaches motivated me with daily messages. My managers at McDonald's® were also there to support me every step of the way, and they were flexible with my work schedule when necessary. When I graduated with my high school diploma from COHS, they threw me a party to celebrate my success. I am proud to say that McDonald's® even created a poster to promote the program with my picture on it and sent it to other restaurants! The McDonald's® Archways to Opportunity program is so important for any employee who never had the chance to reach their goal of earning a high school diploma. I tell people, "Remember: It is never too late. It may be difficult at times, but you can do it." I am 40 years old now, working toward earning my associate's degree, and it was not too late for me. Earning my high school diploma has made all of the difference in my life.



Our Brand of Servant Leadership, Rich Floersch, EVP Global HR, McDonald's Corporation

At McDonald's our brand and story are both intricately connected around the value of service.

At the same time, it's become clear that in the quest to recruit, develop and retain the best talent, we need to expand our service and support of our employees. Our broad commitment to serve employees through education and training is showcased in programs such as [Hamburger University](#), which was founded in 1961 to provide a unique management curriculum now taught in 28 languages; a range of scholarships; college partnerships; and most recently a series of education and training programs under the flagship **Archways to Opportunity**.

Specifically, the McDonald's Archways to Opportunity team has collaborated with Cengage Learning on the important work they are doing around high school completion. Our first graduate, Juan Garcia, recently graduated from Career Online High School (COHS), and matriculated into a post-secondary program, College for America. One year later, Juan has now obtained his Associates of Arts degree (AA). This is a great example of how McDonald's is taking the lead in helping workers advance and secure better paying jobs.

As part of our broader education strategy for front-line workers and entry-level managers, we decided to expand COHS beyond our pilot at corporate-owned restaurants. Now, every eligible U.S. McDonalds employee in corporate and franchise restaurants will have access to Career Online High School at no cost. We believe this is a smart investment in our workforce, enabling thousands of employees to expand their education and skills for advancement in the workforce.

Representing a part of our broader education strategy, we've learned to tap into the extraordinary potential of employees with innovative programs such as Career Online High School.

-Rich Floersch, EVP Global HR, McDonalds

We actively encourage other organizations to join us in our upskilling efforts in offering Career Online High School to their employees. As we've witnessed firsthand, we believe this exercise in servant leadership will pay huge dividends for employees now and excitingly, well into the future.

See more at: <https://www.clintonfoundation.org/blog/2014/08/12/talent-tomorrow-how-mcdonalds-redefining-employee-education-and-training#sthash.RXsEUUvn.dpuf>