

## New and creative ways to attract great talent to manufacturing

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One of the largest issues that manufacturers have said that they have is to find good talent to work in their factories.

As their workers age, they have found that there is a problem finding great workers to learn the business from the bottom up, moving up to replace those workers as they retire. It has been a perplexing problem for years, as most schools have pressed children to get a degree in college where they were told that they would have great jobs waiting for them at the other end of their college experience.



That promise by educators has not panned out. Instead, college graduates have amassed a large amount of debt from attending college that they have had a hard time paying back with the lower-paying jobs that they can get when they graduate.

Instead of the college experience, those who have gone into the trades or into manufacturing have been trained for a career usually at no cost to them and then immediately start earning a good salary just starting out in that career, with no debt. These workers have had someone who helped them to find the way to get into the trades, or take them in to manufacturing plants where they were surprised to learn that so much of what they would do there would involve computers.

They are also surprised to learn that the plants of today are well maintained and bright, with the companies taking an active interest in their teams.

Some of the jobs now available at plants that may appeal to the younger generation include industrial engineer, robotics engineer, production technician and programmer. It is important to rethink the shop floor layout, which can be done by the industrial engineer with the use of AI.

The robotic engineer will be needed to design, program, train, test and maintain the robotics. A production technician is the team member with an eye on the shop floor to make sure things are running properly or to adjust in real time to optimize the production. The programmer has to tell the machine what to do and how to do it.

So how do manufacturers attract the talent of younger people? Here are some of the ways that manufacturers will need to do to reach out to that talent:

1. Start early.

Kids and their parents have no idea of what the modern shop floors look like, unless they have a family member working there. Many business owners became enamored with manufacturing by having plant tours as field trips from elementary schools.

They recall touring the Hostess plant or the Cracker Jack plant, both of which were located in Bedford Park and taking home some goodies. It is important that the parents attend these tours, as well, as they may have preconceived notions of what plants look like in the past.

2. Make friends with guidance counselors.

Guidance counselors work with the kids to help them decide what jobs that they will eventually go into. They can tell which kids are great making things, handling computer projects, and in general what they enjoy.

They can help you to get in front of kids in the classroom talking about the use of computers and robotics in the plants. That can plant seeds in their minds that there are satisfying careers other than going straight to college when they have graduated.

3. Mentor kids.

Look at posting jobs with the schools to take on kids who want to work either in the summers or as part of their high school education.

4. Various manufacturing associations are active in trying to fill that gap. Valley Industrial Association was instrumental in founding GCAMP (Greater Chicago Advanced Manufacturing Partnership), which helps to educate young people on the high-quality, high-skill, high-paying opportunities within the manufacturing field, while dispelling the myths and negative stereotypes surrounding manufacturing.

5. Another active group is Technology and Manufacturing Association's (TMA Education Department. They will train people on various equipment at no cost to the trainee, and get them certified on equipment that will result in a great job for them. This program has over 160 apprentices enrolled from 80 companies who sponsor them.

These are but a few ways that the manufacturing community is actively working to fill the gaps in their workforce. With the right education and reaching out to schools, parents and kids, there is hope that the workforce of the future in manufacturing will be bright.

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