

America's Most Wanted: Skilled Workers, Part 2

GERALD SHANKEL, President and CEO, Fabricators & Manufacturers Association Intl.

By GERALD SHANKEL, President and CEO, Fabricators & Manufacturers Association Intl.



This is part two of a two-part piece. [Part one can be found here \[1\]](#).

Business & Educators Must Partner

Reaching educators is key to improving the future skilled workforce. Education priorities today rarely position manufacturing as a preferred career choice, and high school counselors and principals often fail to realize that manufacturing is a viable option for students. Thus, today's youth just aren't aware of the skills needed in an advanced manufacturing environment and the careers available.

Partnerships between local manufacturers and educational institutions will encourage more people to enter the field, and to employ more skilled workers in plants and factories. Manufacturers should consider offering field trips for local elementary and middle school classes, as well as Boy Scout and Girl Scout troops. Ideally, a young, energetic worker will lead a brief tour of the plant. When students see a clean, modern facility full of sophisticated machinery, it will fascinate them and leave a lasting impression. If more companies partner with schools and youth organizations, and arrange factory visits, the word definitely will spread.

Employers should foster ties with education officials in local communities and be willing to invest in people. Manufacturing equipment suppliers should consider

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donating equipment to local trade or vocational schools to support manufacturing courses. Manufacturers also should advise instructors and counselors at community colleges or high schools on job opportunities available and in curriculum planning.

“Manufacturers should reach out and be more active in their communities,” said Dr. Chris Kuehl, economic analyst for the Fabricators & Manufacturers Association Intl. (FMA). “Manufacturers aren’t terribly active in Chambers of Commerce or professional associations, or with their local universities and colleges.”

In recent memory, one of the most innovative programs designed to give young people a view of manufacturing opportunities is called Max & Ben’s Manufacturing Adventures. It’s a website in which two 13-year-old boys present their tours of local manufacturing facilities in video format. Funded through a community-based job training grant from the Department of Labor, the program was conceived and executed by Western Technical College in La Crosse, WI.

Workforce Development Programs

States, schools and businesses should consider addressing the shortfall in skilled workers directly through vocational training and workforce development programs. One such initiative was recently launched in California. Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger unveiled the “I Built It-Youth” campaign, a statewide effort to begin training California’s future skilled workforce to help rebuild California’s infrastructure.

The campaign is a collaboration between the California Department of Industrial Relations and the California Department of Education. It is designed to promote careers in the construction trades to junior and senior high students through apprenticeship opportunities, and fosters participation in the state’s economic recovery process to prepare them to join the next generation of skilled workers in California.

“Rebuilding California’s infrastructure will require a new generation of skilled workers and this campaign will promote apprenticeships targeted at our youth to prepare them for these important jobs,” Schwarzenegger has stated. “The recent passage of legislation to reform and rebuild the state’s water system is the perfect example of a project that will require the talents and knowledge of these workers. Investing in California’s workforce is a key component to our state’s long-term economic recovery.”

Another example of a successful workforce development program is The Society of Manufacturing Engineers’ partnership with Project Lead The Way. The initiative develops more than 250 Gateway Academies that give young people insight into the value of math, science and teaming. These academies provide a platform for future engineering and manufacturing to help youth find meaningful careers in the skilled trade arena.

Fostering Training

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Another strategy to attract the next generation of workers is a concept employers have used for centuries — the apprenticeship, and its cousin, the internship. Their value has never been so significant and appreciated; young people are exposed to the exciting opportunities in manufacturing, while companies have a chance to recruit, evaluate and hire needed employees. Manufacturers should institute these programs or other training initiatives to introduce high school students to careers in the trades.

Companies also should tap the knowledge of their aging workforce as these highly skilled workers can play a training role both within and outside an organization. Climax Portable Machine Tools, for example, instituted a cross-training program that features senior machinists training and acting as mentors to junior employees, and established an in-house training program to help reverse the attrition of highly trained machinists and to keep them current with the new skills necessary.

Other older machinists act as advisors to instructors at local community colleges to assist them in teaching the newest machining techniques and helping with curriculum planning. By recognizing the value of these workers, Climax strengthens both its own internal processes, and reputation within the community and with customers.

Overhauling Manufacturing's Image

All of the campaigns and programs described here can help change young people's minds about manufacturing — if they hear about them. We must constantly inform the media about all of these exciting initiatives with energetic public information campaigns, work with them to help tell these stories to the public — and convince young people dream jobs are there for the taking.

It's also one of the missions of the NBT: Spark interest among young people in the industry and help revitalize the future of manufacturing in America. The NBT utilizes its resources in local and national public awareness campaigns to spread the message that manufacturing is a viable career option. Information about those efforts and programs is available at www.nutsandboltsfoundation.org [2].

Young people need to know that, both historically and moving forward, there is a high demand and great future potential — including the opportunity to own and operate your own business — that comes with a career in the skilled trades.

To read part one of this two-part series, [1] [please click here](#) [1]. For more information, please visit www.fmanet.org [3].

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America's Most Wanted: Skilled Workers, Part 2

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[2] <http://www.nutsandboltsfoundation.org/Ways-to-Give.cfm>

[3] <http://www.fmanet.org/>