

Recruit & Retain: Closing The Talent Gap

Jeff Turner, president and founder, Turner Machine Company

After years of job declines and diminishing product demand, the manufacturing industry has entered new phase of growth that is leading the way for American economic recovery. According to *The Wall Street Journal*, 2013 saw the



biggest increase in new manufacturing orders in more than two-and-a-half years, while The Manufacturing Institute reports that almost 600,000 jobs have been added to the industry within the same timeframe.

This news has ignited the industry with goals of expansion and innovation. It has also exposed a staggering downward trend that threatens to upend plans for future growth: a severe shortage of manufacturing talent.

Technological advancements within the industry have increased need for a highly skilled workforce. In the face of this gap, industry leaders must also contend with aging workforces, negative perceptions of the market, and a lack of up-and-coming workers with the interest or training they need for available positions.

It's now more important than ever that manufacturing leaders focus on employee recruitment and retention if they aim for future growth.

To properly recruit the talent you need to grow your business, you must first identify what that talent looks like. Based on my experience over the last 25 years, an ideal manufacturing employee has a "gearhead" mentality for mechanics, that is a curiosity for problem solving, multitasking and making things work better. Under the right leadership and proper training, this curiosity harnesses ideas for new innovation and growth.

Recruit & Retain: Closing The Talent Gap

Published on Chem.Info (<http://www.chem.info>)

This mentality should be easy to find in theory, but manufacturing's non-sexy image has steered many high school and college students away from pursuing a career in the industry. According to a recent survey conducted by the Fabricators & Manufacturers Association, 52 percent of U.S. teenagers have little or no interest in a manufacturing career. When asked why, young respondents said they thought manufacturing was a declining field with unprofessional, dead-end jobs, dirty factories and frequent layoffs.

Add this negative connotation to the lack of students coming through the science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) pipeline—a source of pain for the industry for many years—and the problem only grows larger over time. Rather than searching through a shallow pool of talent at the back end of vocational or undergraduate school, start attracting and engaging potential employees from a different angle.

Find out what your ideal employee is interested in, and reach out to these talent stars where they're likely to be. One of my personal strategies is visiting car shows. A true "gearhead" loves the thrill of mechanics both on and off the job, and car shows are a great place to engage with these individuals in a more casual element.

Academic partnerships are another important means of filling the STEM talent pipeline. *The Ivey Business Journal* explains that these partnerships should extend well beyond on-campus recruiting days to developing custom curricula, integrating working experience with schooling, and identifying and developing promising candidates early in their academic careers.

School districts across the country offer industry certification programs as part of a high school curriculum that can feed directly into vocational schools. Ohio has addressed the challenge at the state level with the Pathways to Prosperity Network, a work-based learning program for high school students created in collaboration with local manufacturing and technology employers. Offering your company's services to this type of program helps cultivate a new generation of skilled workers and provides a secure job path for young people who still face the residual effects of recession.

Recruiting through social media is another easy and effective way to connect with a new generation of talent. Sites such as LinkedIn allow you to find individuals with interests and skills that align with your industry and begin a conversation with them in a neutral zone. This style of networking creates a personal connection and a platform for outreach regarding opportunities with your business.

Once you find the right manufacturing employees, it's important to keep these employees happy and engaged with your company.

According to Spherion's Emerging Workforce Study, manufacturing employees are among the most loyal and hardest working, and tend to have more traditional mindsets at work. But the study also reveals that these workers have a relatively high dissatisfaction with both training and career development opportunities and growth potential offered by today's employers

Recruit & Retain: Closing The Talent Gap

Published on Chem.Info (<http://www.chem.info>)

Creating an in-house training and career development program is the first step in remedying this problem. These programs should map out a clear path for employee advancement within your business and help employees reach their full potential in the industry.

Another roadblock to a positive company culture is today's pressure-filled and production-driven manufacturing environment that can easily leave employees feeling beat down, underappreciated and overworked without reward. Take steps to change this negative work environment in your business to encourage retention, and also serve as an attractive feature for potential employees.

Ideas for a creating a positive environment include employee recognition, mentoring programs and outside-of-work activities. You can also establish traditions that make your company unique. Introduce a themed workday, quarterly events or an employee break area with relaxing games and/or catered food. Through these strategies, your employees will feel appreciated and a part of something that's bigger than their individualized tasks.

The tried-and-true business of relationship building is the final key to creating a culture shift within your company. At Turner Machine Company, we get to know every employee as much as we can to eliminate the chance that our employees ever feel like a number rather than a person.

As manufacturing leaders, our employees come from all walks of life and it's important that we get to know their story and understand makes them unique. A personal connection goes a long way in employee satisfaction and in the atmosphere of your manufacturing company as a whole.

Jeff Turner has more than 25 years of manufacturing experience, with 15 years as president and founder of Turner Machine Company, a leading southeast custom machine builder and full-service machine shop located in Smyrna, Tenn.

This story was originally published [here](#) [1].

Source URL (retrieved on 04/19/2015 - 1:27am):

<http://www.chem.info/blogs/2014/04/recruit-retain-closing-talent-gap>

Links:

[1] <http://www.impomag.com/articles/2014/02/recruit-and-retain-strategies-close-manufacturing-talent-gap>