

PLANNING AHEAD: **How to Attract Skilled Employees**

Competition for top talent in manufacturing has never been stiffer. According to a recent World Economic Forum report, 10 million manufacturing jobs around the world cannot be filled due to a “growing skills gap.”

Also, a survey by Deloitte and the Manufacturing Institute reports that 67 percent of U.S. manufacturers are experiencing a “moderate to severe” shortage of qualified workers. And 56 percent believe the shortage will get worse in the next five years.

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What’s the Problem?

Several demographic and sociological changes have led to this manufacturing employment crisis. Perhaps most important, the population is aging. Skilled workers are retiring, and few younger workers are stepping in to take their place in manufacturing jobs.

The image of manufacturing has never been a glamorous one. As a result, many young people don’t think of manufacturing as the high-tech endeavor it now is. In addition, with more high school students going to college instead of trade school, the talent pool of job-ready workers has diminished.

Finding Solutions

With little reason to believe the skilled worker shortage will disappear any time soon, manufacturers are being proactive in developing their own creative solutions to the problem. Here are a few ideas to consider:

- **Build a brand.** Many manufacturers don’t interact with consumers, so they’re not particularly brand conscious. This is a mistake. It’s important to build a brand — a distinctive, unique image and position in the marketplace — to attract employees.

Become known in your community as a “best place to work.” Promote your company’s name via open houses, sponsorships, speaking engagements and other public relations efforts. Get your HR team and employees behind the effort to recruit top talent.

- **Hire interns or apprentices.** If your pool of candidates doesn’t have the skills you need, you may need to train them yourself. A paid internship program allows entry-level students to work at your location for at least minimum wage. They can get a feel for which types of jobs they like, cross-train in several positions, and eventually build skills that will make them employable.

This type of arrangement also lets you assess a candidate’s work ethic and “fit” within your organization.

- **Partner with schools.** Local technical schools may not be aware of the types of skilled labor you need. Consider partnering with them — either formally, by funding an “institute” or lab focused on teaching the skills you need, or informally, by getting to know administrators and giving instructors tours of your facilities. A close relationship with a technical school is also beneficial in keeping current employees’ skills up to date.
- **Create incentives.** If the manufacturer next door is offering better pay and benefits, it’s tough to compete. Stay abreast of local market trends and brainstorm ways to be more attractive than your competitors. Your trade organization is a good resource for HR-related benchmarking data.

If your current employees are well connected, you might also consider referral bonuses to motivate them to find colleagues with the right skill sets.

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We hope you find this information valuable. As always, we are here to help. We are aware of the challenges you face. If you would like our assistance brainstorming solutions, please contact Rich Wile at 314.862.2070 to discuss your unique needs.



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