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## Word to the Wise

### How to Build a Deeper Talent Bench

According to the U.S. Department of Labor, the median age of the manufacturing workforce is on the rise, with the average age of a high-skilled worker pegged at 56 years old. That's a worry for many manufacturing and distribution business owners because as their most skilled workers head toward retirement age, these talented individuals are taking an enormous amount of experience and business intelligence with them.

Who's stepping up to fill the gap in leadership? Unfortunately, it seems that the shortage of qualified manufacturing workers is getting worse, not better. A survey by the Manufacturing Leadership Council showed that 81 percent of companies reported a difficulty in finding qualified workers.

This double whammy of an aging workforce and an unqualified labor pool is hitting manufacturers and distributors hard. That's why creating a leadership development program and building a deep bench of talent are essential for a thriving future.

Here are some ideas to consider as you build your talent bench:

#### Perform a Skills Gap Analysis

In order to keep your leadership pipeline full, you need to know where your team stands now and what you're missing. A skills gap analysis begins with identifying the skills required to do the job — in this case, providing executive leadership in various areas of your business. Then compare the current level of talent to the level required.

This endeavor might start with a leadership skills inventory. For example, what skills do your current leaders possess that are most essential? Knowledge of specific parts of the business? Relationship-building with customers and suppliers? Industry involvement? Financial ability and acuity? Make a list.

Then turn to the next level of management. What are they lacking in these areas and how can you get them the skills they need to step into crucial leadership roles? This may involve individual training programs, job rotation, leadership positions outside the company, and even classes to get them up to speed.

#### Create a Mentoring Program

Manufacturing and distribution companies are good settings for mentoring programs because of the employment longevity of seasoned workers. Whether yours is a formal coaching program or a casual pairing of more experienced and less experienced workers, the resulting knowledge transfer will be formidable.

Depending on how you design your program, you may suggest monthly meetings to discuss career paths, job challenges and goals. Having a program like this in place will help you attract and retain workers and prepare them for the next step on their career ladders.

## Define Career Paths

And speaking of career ladders, does your company have one? Your newest employees need to have some idea of their growth path and career potential in order to stay motivated. While it's not wise to make promises about where a specific worker might be in a few years, it's certainly helpful to illuminate the possibilities for merit-based promotion.

Often, asking about an employee's life goals and ambitions in an annual review is a good starting point for a meaningful conversation about how he or she might want to progress through the business. The bottom line? Be proactive in building your next generation of leaders.



We've seen many examples of great leadership. Let us help you brainstorm ways to build your talent bench.



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