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Toolbox: Promoting Manufacturing Careers

Manufacturing's Missing Generation

By Ted Bauer, Manager of Workforce Development Programs, MassMEP

We have all heard about the young convenience store clerk who cannot make correct change for a simple transaction. Most of us have undoubtedly experienced it. Now try to imagine the dilemma that the "High Precision Advanced Machining" industry is facing with respect to the critical shortage of technically skilled workers to run their multi-million dollar machine tools!

The challenge is to attract the right people into manufacturing, train them appropriately so they will be able to make complex components that end up in aircraft or medical devices that we all depend on.

The glaring lack of basic manufacturing skills education is impacting US manufacturing in a significant way. One of the fundamental reasons that these needs are not being met is that we do not seem to guide our youth to consider careers in manufacturing. Our schools (teachers and guidance counselors), parents, and society, in general, do not seem to understand the opportunities that exist in manufacturing today.

Instead, most of the focus is convincing our youth that they need to go to college regardless of whether they are interested or qualified. The result is a generation that, while some are well educated, possess skills that are not in demand. They are not positioned to take advantage of the numerous opportunities that exist. They find themselves in meaningless jobs with no clear path to progress while our manufacturing base, which is willing to compensate employees well, is in desperate need of people with technical skills.

What so many companies are beginning to realize is that the main problem that needs to be addressed that young people do not seem to be interested in becoming a machinist. Is this due to a lack of knowledge of the industry and its opportunities? Where are the people going to come from to be part of the future of these businesses? Can we provide them the information that can attract them into this industry in sufficient numbers to support this vital infrastructure? Can the situation be reversed before it is too late?

A major change needs to be made or in the not too distant future Massachusetts, New England, and our entire country will lose another industry as more manufacturing goes overseas.

So here we find ourselves struggling and wondering how to address this problem. The good news is that there are people and organizations who are working hard to tackle this serious issue.

RENEW, Worcester Technical High School, M.O.S.T.

In Western MA, The Regional Employment Board of Hampden County, together with the Western Massachusetts chapter of the National Tooling and Machining Association and other industry leaders have launched a project called **Regional NetWorks (RENEW)**.

This network is designed to build capacity for training the workforce, linking training providers, developing linkages along the educational continuum; it includes an awareness component to inform educators, parents, and students of the viability of high technology precision machining as a career-directed, financially rewarding profession.

Another goal of RENEW is to develop linkages with precision machining companies and educational institutions to develop a coordinated regional workforce development system by creating a sustainable pipeline of future workers in the precision machining cluster. A key component is to attract youth into this profession.

In Central MA, Skyline Technical Fund, Inc. has secured a grant that focuses on the need for better trained workers with higher skills to support manufactures and help them remain competitive. The Central Mass. Institute for Workforce Development is designed to reduce barriers and to connect potential and incumbent employees, employers, and technical education and training providers, using the resources of the new Worcester Technical High School. This program will have a significant element that is designed to attract and train younger employees into manufacturing.

The MassMEP, Massachusetts Manufacturing Partnership, is offering M.O.S.T., Mobile Outreach Skills training that is designed to address the skills shortage in manufacturing. This program in addition to offering Core Manufacturing Technical Skills Training also trains individuals to become CNC machine operators.

Manufacturing companies are willing to invest in skills development. However, every business needs a payback to justify any investment. There is a long term need and a desire by business to develop a workforce that is adequately trained in sophisticated systems and technology. There is also a need for a stable workforce that will allow company's to make the necessary investments in order to keep up with the rapid evolution of new technology.

To accomplish this, employers need an educated, committed workforce that will be around for 15 to 20 years, or more. They need younger workers that are willing to take up the challenge in this exciting industry.

How do we get young workers involved?

- It has to start early. Educators must participate and learn about manufacturing opportunities and then share this knowledge with their students to creating awareness.
- There must be outreach to parents and students by industry and related organizations.
- A challenging meaningful curriculum must be developed that will attract students and provide them with the relevant technical skills that are in demand. This curriculum must include real world examples to allow students to connect the theory with practical applications.

We need collaboration with business, educators, government, and parents. Everyone with a stake in our economic future must step up and participate. We need to solve the problem of manufacturing's missing generation.

This PDF titled "[A Career in Toolmaking or Machining Technologies: The Right Choice for Students, Community, & Country](#)", by Harry Moser, Charmilles Technology, outlines the importance and benefits of a career in manufacturing. There is a future in manufacturing and training opportunities are available across the state of Massachusetts.

For more information on workforce training, please contact Ted Bauer, MassMEP at 508-831-7020 or tedb@massmep.org.

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