

Leading the Way on a New Manufacturing Generation

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I want to invite you to go take a walk out onto your shop floor. Go ahead. What do you see?

For starters, you probably see engineering, fabrication and assembly cells, and some rather high-tech machinery used to support each of those functions. You also see employees working in those cells, using their skills and years of experience to get the job done professionally and on time.

Notice anything else about your workforce? Some of them may be graying and soon preparing to retire. The age of your workforce represents a good opportunity for qualified younger employees to step in and launch their career. The problem you face is finding that young person.

The skills gap

All around the country there are manufacturing jobs that employers are looking to fill, but the problem stems from not enough skilled workers to fill them. So just how many jobs are open? According to *Businessweek.com*, there are more than 600,000 U.S. manufacturing jobs that remain unfilled due to a lack of trained workers. In fact, in the United States, technicians and skilled trades represent two of the top three most difficult job categories for manufacturers to fill.

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With unemployment still somewhat high in this country, why aren't people looking at manufacturing as a viable career choice? It starts with perception. I think many people have a negative view toward manufacturing: dirty jobs, tall smoke stacks and hot factories. While at one time that was true, those stereotypes are decades old, and anyone who's been inside a manufacturing facility knows it's an environment filled with cutting-edge technology that requires skill and training to work. But that's part of the problem — people don't know what it's like because they've never been inside a plant. Those antiquated, negative perceptions are hampering the recruiting efforts of young people into the industry and they need to be changed.

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