

# Manufacturing Truth

## Insights From an Industry Veteran



**Chris E. Muhlenkamp**

Consider this: Deloitte and the Manufacturing Institute recently reported that, over the next decade, nearly 3.5 million manufacturing jobs will likely need to be filled. However, in that same report, it's predicted that nearly two million of those jobs will go unfilled.

Why? The manufacturing skills gap, which is linked to the lack of STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) skills among workers – fueled by a decline of technical education programs in high schools as well as a lack of interest in the manufacturing industry by today's youth.

It's easy to point to the stereotypes of manufacturing sweatshops portrayed by Hollywood as generating a sense of perceived negativity that has not been overcome by the manufacturing industry. But it's more than that. Stories and firsthand accounts have been passed through families regarding less-than-desirable conditions of factory work ranging from long hours to repetitive, mindless contributions.

As someone who has spent nearly 40 years in the industry, I can say emphatically that this is not the manufacturing I know. In reality, many manufacturing jobs today are centered on employee empowerment, engagement and innovation. Perhaps the problem is that we, as manufacturers, have not effectively communicated this.

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### Show your stuff

That's why I encourage fellow manufacturers to open their doors to give students and educators the opportunity to engage with their skilled and talented workforces. In Indiana and across the U.S., companies like Allegion hold open houses regularly to highlight modern-day manufacturing and career opportunities.

Government and civic leaders can also be invited to see, firsthand, what manufacturing looks like today. In fact, manufacturers can use facility tours and employee roundtables as opportunities to communicate the need for our nation's leaders to continue delivering on manufacturing priorities to boost the economy and bolster our workforce. To get where we want to be, government needs to invest more resources in STEM education and prioritize initiatives that will work toward closing the skills gap.

Spreading the word and rallying government leaders, though, can only take us so far. The bright future for manufacturing involves new technologies that provide customers with shorter delivery cycle times and higher quality. It is imperative to have employees who have not just the desire, but also the knowledge, expertise and capability to run, manage and maintain such tools.

### Talent strategies

This requires additional investments from manufacturers – in our employees, in skill development, and in tools and equipment. I have supported a number of initiatives to positively impact the continued development of factory workers that other manufacturers could use to make a positive impact. Those include:

- Comprehensive orientation programs such as lean training and product training
- Internal, state-approved skilled trade apprenticeship programs
- Tuition reimbursement opportunities for skill and workplace enhancements
- Partnerships with local vocational and technical schools to develop trade-specific curriculum
- Transition of part-time and temporary employees to full-time positions
- Paid internships for technical skills training and education students
- Loaded, valued-added co-op and internship assignments
- Application for local and state training funds to enhance employee skills education

I firmly believe manufacturing in the U.S. is at a crossroads. Informing and inspiring the next generation of manufacturing employees will require a great deal of work and effort, but it's a worthy cause. Manufacturers must continuously commit to combating the skills gap as well as investing in the future of the country's workforce and in the communities in which we work.



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