

Connector

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Impacting the Future of Manufacturing

Manufacturers are finding it increasingly more difficult to find skilled workers, even for jobs that pay triple the minimum wage. Dick Druffner, Human Resources Manager at Die-Tech agrees. "When we can't find skilled labor to fill our job openings, we look for candidates with a solid set of basic skills, such as math, reading and written communication and we teach the technical skills."

Only 7% of the country's high schools prepare students for an industry certification. Most counselors are well versed in what students need to get into college, but few know about training for jobs in trades or for careers that don't require a college education.

"Many educators have little knowledge or personal experience of workforce needs in the manufacturing environment. Vocational teachers have to do a better job in making the connection between school and work to students, counselors and parents, along with preparing their students for jobs and careers," adds Druffner.

"Moreover, employers need to share with educators how manufacturing careers can be challenging and fulfilling."

One way to make that happen is through educator visits; a concept developed by Millersville University and promoted by MANTEC Inc., a private non-profit 501 (c) 3 organization dedicated to meeting the needs of small and mid-sized manufacturing enterprises of South Central Pennsylvania. Die-Tech agreed to participate by serving as an employer host for a group of educators enrolled in a Millersville University educational workshop entitled *Preparing Students to Meet Workforce Needs*.

Druffner was assigned the coordinator role and developed the plan for the educator visit. It was a three-hour program that included formal presentations, as well as a plant tour and panel discussion. In order to make the panel discussion more meaningful, every Die-Tech employee was asked to complete an Educational Survey designed to capture a wide variety of opinion as to how teachers could better prepare students to meet the needs of the workplace. The responses were compiled and shared with the educators during their visit.

"The emphasis," related Druffner, "was on providing insight as to what is right and what is wrong with the K-12 education process from a real-world manufacturing employer perspective." Some educators were surprised to learn that relationship skills, critical thinking, teamwork, self-directed behavior, computerization and the concepts of lean manufacturing were highly valued. "There is still the misconception that jobs in manufacturing require low skill levels and are performed in greasy, dirty, poorly ventilated plants. We need to dispel that misimpression. It's so important that our teachers understand the role technology and engineering play in a progressive manufacturing workplace."

Heartened by the great appreciation expressed by the educators as they left, Druffner put it all in perspective. "It's a simple equation," admits Druffner. "Well trained employees equal satisfied customers."

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