

Manufacturers Face Shortage Of Highly-Skilled Workers

DEARBORN, Mich.— As employers across the country continue to shed hundreds of thousands of jobs, many manufacturers are facing an ironic dilemma. As they eliminate positions—mainly repetitive, assembly type jobs—they still have unfilled job openings for high-skilled workers.

According to a recent [survey](#) [1] conducted by Deloitte, The Manufacturing Institute and Oracle, “almost one-third of responding companies report some level of shortages today.”

These shortages of high-skilled workers are particularly acute within “the most profitable companies, aerospace and defense and life science sectors,” and among “skilled production workers, scientists and engineers.”

“This is certainly an employer’s market, but not as much with manufacturers,” says Mark C. Tomlinson, executive director and general manager of the Society of Manufacturing Engineers.

“Manufacturers are looking for employees who are the opposite of the stereotypical factory worker doing repetitive, assembly line work. They are in need of 21st century workers with specialized technical training such as machinists, operators and technicians,” he adds.

The survey also shows that many manufacturers are “not acting” on finding these types of workers or are depending on largely ineffective “traditional approaches to managing and developing their employees,” like current performance, rather than on the latest “talent management trends” such as “lean and industry-recognized skills credentials.”

Respondents to this survey also reported dissatisfaction with the skills of their current employees. Nearly half indicated many workers have inadequate basic employability skills, such as attendance, timeliness and work ethic, while 46 percent reported inadequate problem-solving skills, and 36 percent indicated insufficient reading, writing, and communication skills.

Tomlinson believes that these employment trends bring to light the strong possibility that many manufacturers may be unsure of where to recruit talented workers and contends that “associations can be a one-stop resource to find or even train new, high-skilled workers.”

For its part, the Society of Manufacturing Engineers offers such options as industry credentials including a new Green Manufacturing Specialist Certificate with Purdue

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University, a multi-level lean certification program as well as flexible corporate training.

Through corporate training, SME helps companies identify their workforce knowledge gaps and can then facilitate the necessary training.

Many companies have had their employees take one of SME's standardized tests which provide a snapshot of where employee knowledge currently stands.

"Employers need to know their workers' baseline knowledge so that they can determine what training and experience employees need to make them more productive for the company," says Kris Nasiatka, SME certification manager.

Once assessed, the employer can deliver training, then re-test.

"There is a difference between skills and knowledge. It is one thing to teach someone how to operate a CNC panel, another to understand cause and effect which can contribute to problem-solving. We also offer pre-and post-assessments to help workers see where they need improvement," Nasiatka explains.

"We take a consultative approach. We design and deliver the most robust content based on the needs of manufacturers," she adds.

The [Society of Manufacturing Engineers \(SME\)](#) [2] connects manufacturing practitioners to each other, to the latest technology and the most up-to-date processes spanning all manufacturing industries and disciplines, plus the key areas of aerospace and defense, medical device, motor vehicles, including motorsports, and oil and gas.

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[1] <http://www.deloitte.com/us/peoplemanagementpractices>

[2] <http://www.sme.org/>