

Attention Stark County manufacturers: Opportunity is knocking



Your turn

James T. Batchelder

The Conference Board C-Suite Outlook 2022 global survey of 917 CEOs concludes that labor shortages are the third biggest external factor that will have the greatest impact on their business this year.

Some CEOs are working on retention of current employees by watching employee-sentiment survey results. Others are attempting to create more stability for employees, like investing in providing more affordable housing. Others are investing in automation, which with the sales growth automation allows still results in more job growth overall, including the higher-paying jobs in technology.

Edd Pritchard's article in the Sunday Canton Repository about the labor shortage here in Stark County is no surprise to our manufacturing CEOs. Most Stark County manufacturers are experiencing the same severe labor shortage referenced in the Conference Board survey and Edd's article.

The labor shortage is limiting their sales growth. In manufacturing companies across Stark County, it doesn't matter what the sales team can sell — it matters more what the manufacturing team can make and ship.

The Stark County Manufacturing Workforce Development Partnership has brought together more than 40 local manufacturers, schools, nonprofits and intermediaries to focus on growing the labor pool in Stark County and on training incumbent workers to make room for entry-level workers.

Manufacturers stealing employees from each other isn't going to solve our labor shortage. We need to get more people interested in manufacturing careers, whether they be students or job switchers. We also need to keep more of our high school and college graduates in Stark County.

The underlying causes of the labor shortage are many. Some causes include the COVID pandemic led some baby boomers and workers with underlying health conditions to retire early out of a concern for their health. Some parents of young children dropped out because schools were closed, and they didn't have backup childcare. The very contagious delta and omicron variants also resulted in children

being exposed which caused additional missed school days which made parents miss work — all unpredictable.

Federal grant money is available to pursue programs that help solve the labor shortage. The Partnership is looking for Stark County manufacturers to join forces and commit to participate in the Good Jobs Challenge.

The U.S. Economic Development Administration's American Rescue Plan Good Jobs Challenge aims to get Americans back to work by building and strengthening systems and partnerships that bring together employers who have hiring needs with other key entities to train workers with in-demand skills that lead to good-paying jobs.

Through the Good Jobs Challenge, EDA is allocating \$500 million to collaborative skills training systems and programs. Why not bring some of this federal money back to Stark County?

The Partnership needs interested Stark County manufacturers to provide a commitment letter to support our grant application. The commitment letter asks:

- In the next five years, what total hiring demand do you anticipate resulting from a mix of growth, normal turnover and retirements?
- What are the most important occupations in this mix?
- And finally, if economic conditions remain unchanged, will you commit to collaborating with the Partnership to source these hires in the years to come?

Any grant money received by the Partnership will be used for many purposes, including to:

- Recruit workers to manufacturing positions.
- Address barriers to people working, like childcare, transportation or housing.
- Provide training whether it be soft skills like the importance of getting to work on time or specific job skills like operation of CNC machines.

I encourage all interested manufacturers to contact Barbara Bennett at the Canton Regional Chamber of Commerce for more information. Letters of support must be to her by Jan. 26: Barbara H Bennett, PE, PS, LEED-AP, Vice President of Education/Workforce, Canton Regional Chamber of Commerce, 222 Market Ave. N, Canton, OH 44702; 330.458.2059; or barbb@cantonchamber.org.

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