



FILLING AMERICA'S JOBS

Working with CEOs to Communicate the Importance
Of a Skilled Workforce in Sector Workforce Development

The sixth in a series of "How-To" Guides from the Center for Workforce Success

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Sixth in a series of Center for Workforce Success "How-To" Guides
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Acknowledgments

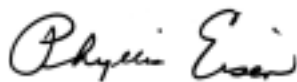
Filling America's Jobs is a series of handbooks created by the Center for Workforce Success to help U.S. manufacturers with their workforce development challenges. This “how-to” guide is the sixth in our series and focuses on the development of CEO spokespeople who can effectively communicate the importance of employer investments in workforce development and initiate involvement with their peers in speaking out about the critical need for engagement and action in solving our nation’s skills gaps.

This publication is the result of work done in partnership with the National Network of Sector Partners and through the Precision Metalforming Association, the Power Transmission Distributors Association and their Education Foundations to develop sector workforce initiatives in Minnesota and Ohio. The Charles Stewart Mott, Annie E. Casey and Hitachi Foundations supported our work, both financially and intellectually, and we are grateful for their engagement.

We also are grateful to Margaret Ferry, who worked very closely with us in developing our CEO spokespeople in this initiative. Her patience, intelligence, quick thinking and good ideas kept our initiative on track and we appreciate her flexibility and good humor in accommodating our changes over the life of this work.

As a result of trying to understand, engage and support CEO spokespeople in sector workforce development, we have created a base of knowledge for the Center’s most recent and on-going work in developing our Business Champions for a Competitive Workforce initiative. The Center’s “Business Champions” are a task force of business leaders who seek to close the skills gaps by expanding educational opportunities at community colleges, and they are raising awareness and promoting policies among policymakers, higher education officials and employers to improve two-year colleges’ workforce development capacity. The Business Champions will bring a strong and unified voice to speak out about practical solutions and recognize that change requires efforts on many fronts, as they work at national, state and local levels to effect change.

We hope you find this “how-to” guide useful to developing your own employer champions, and if you want to know more about our expanding work on Business Champions, please visit the Center for Workforce Success Web site at www.nam.org/workforce. A resource and contact guide is located at the back of this guide.



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Introduction

This manual is intended as a guide to carrying out a strategic communications effort with a targeted group of CEOs who are willing to speak out on the importance of workforce development to the future of U.S. manufacturing. It is intended for use by employer associations and trade associations affiliated with the National Association of Manufacturers (NAM), as well as local chambers and other business organizations involved with workforce development issues.

The information contained in this manual is based on a communications strategy successfully implemented with pilot sector projects in Minneapolis, Minn., and Cleveland, Ohio, in 2005-2006. This was a peer-to-peer campaign, with CEOs making the case for increased workforce development training and the economic impact of failing to invest in such efforts. We have included elements of that campaign that can be used as a framework by other manufacturing sectors to undertake similar initiatives.

In the *2005 Skills Gap Report* by The Manufacturing Institute/Center for Workforce Success, the research and education arm of the NAM, 90 percent of manufacturers said they were facing a shortage of skilled production workers and could not find enough workers to fill those jobs. The communications strategies summarized in this guide were driven by a need to have more CEO-level dialogue on the importance of filling that gap. Strategies were developed based on the premise that the employer voice is the most effective one for taking this message forward.

The success of such a communications effort depends first and foremost on the availability and willingness of CEOs to participate. Once corporate spokespeople have been identified, other key elements critical to success include: careful cultivation of the spokespeople, developing a targeted strategy that makes best use of their time, and identifying the right mix of outlets and events to take the key messages forward.

This manual is not intended as a comprehensive guide for general communications campaigns. Rather, it focuses exclusively on specific communications initiatives designed to increase participation by CEO-level spokespeople. The tips and tools included should be useful when undertaking similar efforts with CEOs, but are not meant to provide an exhaustive list.

We believe that CEOs need to step up and speak out about the importance of these issues to the 21st-century workforce and to the future of manufacturing in the United States. We hope that the information and tools provided in this guide will help you identify additional CEOs willing to do so.

What You Need To Know

“We are committed to investing time and money in the education and training of our employees to help them advance in a rewarding manufacturing career path. Only with highly trained employees can we meet our goals of providing a quality product in a timely manner for the best value.”

— Elizabeth Abraham, CEO, Top Tool, Minneapolis



Filling America's Jobs



What You Need To Know

The Role of CEOs in a Communications Strategy

Until recently, much of the dialogue about the importance of training and the need for a skilled workforce has taken place at the HR-manager level. Recruiting champions who are CEOs, COOs and presidents elevates that dialogue to the boardroom level.

These CEOs understand that investments in their workforce have substantial returns—and they are committed to putting the resources in place to appropriately train skilled workers. Using these executives to communicate the value of workforce development initiatives has several advantages, among them:

- Business people listen to business people. Hearing from peers has an impact that goes beyond hearing from colleagues in associations, intermediary groups, educational institutions or other partners involved in workforce development programs.
- The investment in training is framed as a critical business objective with a positive impact on a company's bottom line. Beyond the logic that "training is a good thing to do," CEOs can speak to their peers about the broader economic impact of failing to invest and be involved in such programs.

The Challenges of Working with CEOs as Spokespeople

CEOs are busy running their companies and may have limited time available for such communications efforts, even though they are, in principle, committed to them. Effectively managing the time they make available can be a challenge. To keep them engaged at this level, consider the following:

- Cultivate relationships: Start by listening. Be sure you understand their priorities and concerns and how they fit within your communications messages. (See "Identifying Champions" in the "What You Need To Do" section of this guide.)
- Make it easy for them to participate: Provide talking points and other background materials that clearly and concisely articulate the messages you want the CEOs to put forward. (See "Tools" section for examples.)
- Don't overuse or abuse their time: Keep requests to a minimum. Try to develop a large enough group of spokespeople at the outset so you are not repeatedly asking the same people to participate.

It is worth noting that at both pilot program sites, the number of initially envisioned communications strategies had to be cut back because of the number of spokespeople participating. There is a limited number of speaking engagements or media interviews that a CEO can reasonably be asked to conduct on behalf of a program that is outside of immediate company business.

- Look for ways to make your spokespeople part of networks that are of use to them: Involve them as appropriate in other efforts with their peers so they see the benefit of this role.

In some cases, the first contact may not be at the CEO/president/COO level. So think about working with the appropriate vice president or HR manager to engage their executives.

A Note About Staffing

Dedicate an experienced communications professional to managing these efforts. Relationships with CEOs need to be carefully cultivated. Communications relating to broader workforce development initiatives need to be reviewed to assure that the employer voice is being heard. And, strategies need to be constantly assessed, with appropriate steps taken to adjust plans and programs along the way.

What You Need To Do

“The number one key to any distributor’s success is finding good people. We need to find new ways of attracting people with the right skills to this career path.”

—Tom Bohardt, CEO of Meier Holding, LLC, Cleveland, Ohio



Filling America’s Jobs

What You Need To Do

Identifying Spokespeople

A CEO spokesperson's effort should only be initiated when at least two or three potential spokespeople have already been identified by core team members within a local sector workforce initiative. As noted in the previous section, developing a large enough group of spokespeople is essential to success. Assessing individual executive's willingness and availability to participate and speak out is a key part of this process. Conduct personal interviews with each CEO to assess their interest and gauge their commitment. Consider developing a survey/questionnaire (see the "Tools" section for sample questions) that can be used to help draw out the personal experiences that tell the story and identify potential outlets and venues for carrying the message forward. The latter is particularly important given the peer-to-peer element of this campaign— who do the CEOs listen to?

It may not be possible to schedule in-person meetings or extended phone interviews with each one. Providing them with an e-mail survey that can be followed up by a brief telephone interview will achieve the same goals. (See the "Tools" section for a sample.)

Articulating the Message

The basic messages you want the CEO spokesperson to communicate must be clearly and concisely stated from the outset. Once approved, these messages will be tailored to include the individual personal stories of the CEOs (See "Telling the Story," page 6). But the core messages should not change. Once articulated, these core messages also help keep all parties—CEOs as well as other partners—on track with communications goals.

There are several ways to evaluate whether your core messages are on target. Focus groups can be conducted to test language and messaging with target constituencies. Less formal testing can also be effective, especially for smaller groups. A combination of personal interviews and small group discussions was used at the pilot sites.

Below are samples of the broad messages that were used to form the basis of the communication strategies at the two pilot sites:

- Workforce training initiatives meet important business objectives (training may not be a business objective, but having enough skilled workers to meet demand for product is).
- Employers believe training/workforce development is a necessary investment—not a choice—that must be done to meet the need for skilled employees, both current demand and filling the pipeline for the future.
- A high percentage of jobs are going unfilled because of a lack of skilled workers. Employers need every single person they can get and employer-supported workforce training is the best means to that end.
- Keep economies strong by ensuring businesses have skilled workforces and individuals have the skills they need to stay employed—overcoming their perception that manufacturing is a dying industry and highlighting manufacturing's contributions to the economy.
- The success of these programs in contributing to the economic development of regions because companies invest in creatively designing programs to find and retain skilled workers, which keeps companies operating in the region.

- This is a long-term investment that takes place over years (versus a one-time program) and combines workforce and economic development strategies to increase benefits to the company, employees and the community at large, as well as the future of manufacturing in our nation.

Timelines, venues, spokespeople and strategies were adapted as program developments warranted at both pilot sites in Minnesota and Ohio. But the core messages as outlined above remained the same, and were at the heart of all communications.

Telling the Story/Personalizing the Message

Using the information gathered from the questionnaires and interviews mentioned above, craft specific company stories to personalize the message. Include specific examples and develop quotes from the CEOs that can be included in various communications vehicles, such as publications and speeches, and shared with the media.

Any message is stronger and more effective when it includes personal stories about real people. Tell their stories as much as possible—talk about the specific experiences and the concrete benefits the company receives as a result of workforce development programs.

It is worth reiterating that business people listen to other business people. Hearing from peers has an impact that goes beyond hearing from colleagues in associations, intermediary groups, educational institutions or other partners involved in workforce development programs.

Training the Spokespeople

It's important to work with your CEO spokespeople so they are comfortable with the messages you have agreed to communicate. Formal media training sessions are not required because most executives at this level have had some experience in this arena. But, you can still help them to stay on message and make it easier for them to be comfortable when questioned. For example:

- Provide talking points (see the “Tools” section for samples);
- Summarize agenda topics and audiences for speaking engagements; and
- Review possible questions in advance of media interviews.

Identifying Targets/Outlets

Use as many outlets as possible to carry the message forward. One article or one speech will not reach a broad enough audience to have a significant impact. Any combination of print (newsletters, local newspapers—news and op-eds), radio (public service announcements, radio news tours), trade association meetings and other speaking engagements can be used. Be strategic about timing, be selective about your targets and, as noted above, be considerate about the way you are using individuals.

Specific targets will vary depending on local circumstances. A few examples from our pilot programs' efforts may be worth noting here:

- Chamber and association newsletters or Web sites: Local chambers and business associations provide ready access to the target audience of the CEO's peers. Often these organizations already are partners in conducting the workforce programs. Work with them to find appropriate outlets for communicating their messages.
- Trade and professional association meetings: Once again, the business association can be helpful in identifying national meetings where key representatives of the CEO target audience will be in attendance. Work with the national association to secure speaking engagements.

- Radio—PSA vs. News: Initial plans at our pilot sites called for production of radio PSAs (public service announcements) featuring their CEOs. Upon further discussion, it was determined that the CEO messages were not really a fit for PSAs, and that a radio news tour featuring them (one from each pilot site) would be a more appropriate vehicle for reaching the intended audiences.

The Role of Other Partners

There are many partners involved in conducting sector-driven workforce development initiatives, among them are workforce intermediary groups, educational institutions and national sector trade associations. As previously noted, this guide focuses exclusively on specific communications initiatives designed to increase participation by CEO-level spokespeople. It may be necessary to continue to re-articulate the above CEO-driven messages for other partners who may be focused on other audiences (for example, recruiting students). Working with all partners to assure that the employer voice is represented in all communications is an important element of a successful campaign.

Tools

“We want entry-level workers to see that they can move up through the system and develop a rewarding career path within our company and this industry. We have to address our customers’ evolving needs for reasonable costs and faster response times, and we need a skilled workforce to do that.”

— Deborah Cooper, President, Rotation Engineering, Brooklyn Park, Minn.



Filling America's Jobs

Minnesota ‘Make It Happen’ Metalforming Skills Program

Fact Sheet

Background and Overview

The Minnesota “Make It Happen” metalforming skills program was designed to meet employer needs by providing manufacturers in the Twin Cities region with well-trained entry-level employees who have the necessary skills for on-the-job success. The program was being carried out by Hennepin Technical College and HIRED, a non-profit employment and training provider, with assistance from the Precision Metalforming Association (PMA) Educational Foundation. Key partners include member companies in PMA’s Twin Cities District and other local metalworking companies.

The program helped employers meet demands for a skilled workforce by connecting industry, workforce development service providers and potential employees. Classes were offered in Metalforming Level I, a curriculum developed to teach entry-level skills identified by industry as critical to success. A Metalforming Level II Stamping course was also offered. An Occupational English component focused on language skills and vocabulary specific to the metalforming industry. Following completion of each course, HIRED helped unemployed participants find positions with the employer partners. Incumbent workers often were eligible for promotions and/or wage increases with their current employers.

Goals

The major goal of the Minnesota Make It Happen effort was to create an employer-driven training and career ladder program in the metalforming sector that meets the needs of both employers and employees by—

- connecting employers with local resources in order to improve their workforce and increase their profitability;
- connecting local residents with opportunities for rewarding careers in the metalforming industry.

Outcomes

The outcomes of the two-year project included recruitment and training of 96 low-income individuals and the placement or promotion due to upgraded skills of 83 of those individuals in sector-related jobs. As of March 2006, the program had graduated 47 adults, with 33 more in training. The program was so successful that it has evolved into the M-Powered program and continues to train and place individuals in the metalworking industry.

Partners

- Hennepin Technical College
- HIRED
- Precision Metalforming Association Educational Foundation
- A super-advisory council of 23 local industry employers

Funding

Funding for the project was provided through the Center for Workforce Success at the National Association of Manufacturers’ Manufacturing Institute, the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, the Hitachi Foundation and the Precision Metalforming Association Educational Foundation.

Participating Employer Testimonials

“This program is working for manufacturers, employees and students in Minnesota. It is achieving dual goals of helping companies find skilled workers and employees find jobs and career ladders in the precision metal forming industry. The effort ties closely to the Minnesota Manufacturing Coalition’s goals of attracting more people to careers in manufacturing and keeping manufacturing a vital part of Minnesota’s economy.”

Erick Ajax, Vice President, E.J. Ajax & Sons, Minneapolis

“Finding skilled workers is an ongoing challenge for us. Business has been ramping up over the last 18 months, but we have not been able to find trained workers with the appropriate skills. This effort will help us to meet that need. We have to address our customers’ evolving needs for reasonable costs and faster response times, and we need a skilled workforce to do that. And we want entry-level workers to see that they can move up through the system and develop a rewarding career path within our company and this industry.”

Deborah Cooper, President, Rotation Engineering Inc., Brooklyn Park

“We’re participating in this innovative program because we need a well-trained workforce in order to meet customer demands. We rely on highly skilled workers to meet our business objectives.”

John Timmersman, President, Marshall Manufacturing, Minneapolis

“I appreciate the fact that the educational institutions understand our requirements and have crafted a training program that addresses them so well. Manufacturing as a whole has changed in recent years. As the industry has gotten smarter and leaner, our tasks have become more complicated, requiring a more highly skilled workforce. We believe that working in the manufacturing industry is a profession, and are committed to investing time and money on education and training for our employees to help them advance in a rewarding career path. Only with highly trained employees can we meet our goals of providing a quality product in a timely manner for the best value. When we do that, we can better meet our customer demands and increase sales.”

Elizabeth Abraham, CEO, Top Tool, Minneapolis

For More Information

- Joe Fredkove, Director, Training & Business Development, Hennepin Technical College, (763) 550-7218, joe.fredkove@hennepintech.edu
- Dave Sansone, Executive Director, PMA Educational Foundation, (216) 901-8800, dsansone@pma.org
- Stacey Wagner, Managing Director, Center for Workforce Success, National Association of Manufacturers, (202) 637-3101, swagner@nam.org

The Industrial Careers PathwaySM Cleveland Project

Fact Sheet

Background and Need

The Cleveland Industrial Careers PathwaySM (ICP) project is an employer-led sectoral strategy that will increase employment opportunities for local residents and improve the health of local industrial distributors by creating a system to provide a “work ready” stream of potential employees. The Cleveland ICP is being carried out by the Power Transmission Distributors Association (PTDA) Foundation and the Westside Industrial Retention and Expansion Network (WIRE-Net).

The Cleveland ICP actively promotes careers in the industrial distribution channel and helps distributors and manufacturers enhance how they hire, train and promote employees. The effort responds to industrial distributors’ critical need for qualified employees and addresses their concern about growing a capable workforce ready to serve global customers. The initiative also is designed to give current employees an opportunity to upgrade their skills and provide a pathway for career advancement.

Goals

Major goals of the Cleveland ICP are to—

- connect industrial distribution and manufacturing employers with local resources in order to improve their workforce and increase their profitability; and
- connect local residents with opportunities for rewarding careers in industrial distribution and manufacturing.

Timeline and Projected Outcomes

The Cleveland ICP will seek to enroll 60 incumbent and new students in the Introduction to Industrial Distribution course at Cuyahoga Community College, followed by placement and/or advancement at local companies. In addition to meeting the employer needs as described above, the project will promote increased job retention and advancement practices in industrial distributor companies in the Cleveland area by analyzing industrial distributor/manufacturers’ retention and advancement rates and developing improvement strategies for participating companies.

The PTDA Foundation plans to replicate this initiative in other locations. Cleveland is one of eight current ICP sites and the PTDA Foundation is targeting 22 additional new sites in the United States and Canada.

Partners

- PTDA Foundation
- WIRE-Net
- Cuyahoga County Workforce Development
- City of Cleveland Workforce Development
- Cuyahoga Community College
- ICP Pathway Alliance of 23 local employer associations and their employer members

Funding

Funding for the Cleveland project was provided through the Center for Workforce Success at the National Association of Manufacturers' Manufacturing Institute, The Annie E. Casey Foundation, The Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, The Hitachi Foundation, the PTDA Foundation and WIRE-Net.

For More Information

Phyllis Russell, PTDA Foundation, (312) 516-2100, info@industrialcareerspathway.org

Interview Questions for CEO Spokespeople

Part I

1. Why is your business participating in this workforce initiative? (For example: Did you have jobs going unfilled, or business opportunities lost, because you could not find properly trained skilled workers?)
2. How is this initiative helping you meet your business objectives?
3. How is this initiative having a positive economic impact on your business? (Or, how do you anticipate it will have a positive economic impact?)
4. How is this initiative helping to meet customer demands?
5. What other comments would you have for other executives considering participating in similar workforce development initiatives?

Part II

6. What industry trade or professional associations are you active in that would be good partners in communicating industry trends, developing joint initiatives and joint policy work?
7. Who are the key media—in your perspective—locally? What about trade journals?
8. What publications do you read for information on trends and issues affecting your industry?
9. What professional association trade shows, conferences and meetings do you participate in?

Participating Employer Questionnaire

Minnesota 'Make It Happen' Precision Metalworkers Sector Project

Thank you for the leadership role you have taken as a member of the "Super Advisory Group" for the Minnesota "Make It Happen" sector project. We want to assure that the employer voice continues to be heard in all of our efforts. In that regard, we would appreciate you taking a few minutes to answer the questions below. Your frank responses will be used to develop our public information materials and frame our communications efforts.

Name _____

Title/Company _____

Why is your business participating in this workforce initiative? (For example: Did you have jobs going unfilled, or business opportunities lost, because you could not find properly trained skilled workers?)

How is this initiative helping you meet your business objectives?

How is this initiative having a positive economic impact on your business?

How is this initiative helping to meet customer demands?

Did you participate in the job fair held in December 2006? (circle response) Yes No

Did you interview qualified applicants? Yes No

Did you hire new employees? Yes No

If so, what skills are they bringing to your company that are the result of this training program?

If not, why?

What other comments would you have for executives considering participating in similar workforce development initiatives?

Talking Points for Minnesota Spokespeople PMA Speeches — Fall 2006

- [Begin by introducing yourself and giving a brief background of your company]
- I am here today to talk with you about the Minnesota Make It Happen project—an innovative workforce development program that a number of precision metalforming companies in the Twin Cities region are participating in to help meet our needs for skilled workers.
- I also want to share with you some thoughts on why I believe it is so important for executives like us to be speaking out on these issues.
- Some of what I'm about to say may be all too familiar, and some of this may seem like “preaching to the proverbial choir”—but consider it as one executive's perspective on this local effort to meet workforce development needs. We have a partnership that is working in the Twin Cities region, and hopefully some of the insights and experiences I will share in the next few minutes are relevant to your own local circumstances.
- I'm sure I don't need to remind you of the recession we experienced a few years ago and the painful effects for our industry and individual companies, including my own. We recognized that if we were to survive, we needed to reinvent ourselves into a smarter, leaner manufacturing operation. We needed trained workers with skills and technical knowledge to succeed in this new environment.
- Every year, our work becomes more complicated, requiring higher levels of skills and greater creativity. Meeting the skills gap and filling the pipeline with well-trained workers is now essential to meeting our business objectives. Only with highly skilled employees can we meet our goals of providing quality products in a timely manner for the best value. When we do that, we better meet our customer demands and increase sales.
- According to a recent survey released by the National Association of Manufacturers, The Manufacturing Institute and Deloitte Consulting, nearly 90 percent of manufacturers say they are having trouble filling skilled jobs such as machinists and technicians.
- So as the competition for skilled workers continued to increase, we found ourselves looking for innovative ways to meet our needs. The Minnesota Make It Happen program is one such effort. It is a career ladder program with a curriculum designed to ultimately place employees on a path for outstanding careers in our industry. And it is unique in that it is employer-driven.
- The local partners (Hennepin Technical College and HIRED, a non-profit employment and training provider) really took into account our needs in developing a highly focused curriculum to address specific skills necessary for success in our industry. The 12-week, 96-hour program is designed to provide the skills and training necessary for on-the-job success. In the first 18 months of the program, 47 adults graduated from the Metalforming Level I class. An impressive 30 of them were placed in industry jobs and seven have graduated from advanced level-2 classes.
- My company is one of 23 participating employers in the Twin Cities region [speak about specific experience of why you chose to become involved, what you hope to see as result].

- I believe the future of our industry lies in successful workforce development initiatives such as this one. PMA has given its support as a partner in the program and in providing me with this opportunity to address this audience. I should also recognize the support the National Association of Manufacturers and The Center for Workforce Success are providing for these efforts—they have supported similar initiatives around the country for more than a decade and will continue to do so.
- The final point I'd like to make is the importance of executives like us speaking out on this issue of training and workforce development. Too often it seems that training issues fall in the purview of HR managers, and not on the radar screen of CEOs and other executives.
- We need to elevate this dialogue and speak out more about why training and workforce development initiatives are critical to meeting our business objectives.
- As I mentioned earlier, this investment in training is having a positive impact on the bottom line. It is attracting more people to careers in manufacturing and keeping manufacturing a vibrant part of Minnesota's economy.
- We need to engage others in this commitment to training, to promoting state support for workforce development initiatives and to broadly sending a message that this kind of initiative is vital to manufacturing, to the country's economy and to our nation's future.

Media Advisory – Radio News Tour

Leaner, More Skilled Manufacturing Sees Growth

While the U.S. manufacturing sector has contracted sharply since the early 1980s, employment in high-skilled manufacturing—an area where the United States still has a competitive edge—has been expanding, growing as much as 37 percent during that time. And employers are desperately seeking workers with math, computer and mechanical abilities to fill high-paying, high-skilled jobs with rewarding career paths.

Some manufacturers are so desperate for workers who can program, run or repair the computers and robots that now dominate the factory floor that they offer recruitment bonuses, relocation packages and other incentives more commonly associated with white-collar jobs. These jobs pay well too: \$50,000 to \$80,000 a year for workers with math, computer and mechanical abilities. This desperation comes at a critical time for manufacturers—the baby boomers are retiring, manufacturing facilities are becoming more sophisticated and young people don't understand the rewarding jobs of modern manufacturing. A workforce crisis is imminent.

Top Tool in Minneapolis is such a manufacturer. Named “Small Business of the Year” in 2005 by the Metro North Chamber of Commerce, Top Tool makes precision metal components and has been looking for a production manager for more than a year. In their business, which is ISO certified, they need multiskilled workers who understand dies and stamping, engineering and quality control.

Finding skilled workers is hard because of the outdated image many people hold of manufacturing and the lack of interest in taking math and science courses that lead to manufacturing jobs.

So Elizabeth Abraham, CEO of Top Tool, works with area colleges to develop her workers of the future. “We believe that working in the manufacturing industry is a profession and are committed to investing time and money on education and training for our employees to help them advance in a rewarding career path.” Abraham also believes this investment in training is helping to meet business objectives and having a positive impact on the bottom line. “Only with highly trained employees can we meet our goals of providing a quality product in a timely manner for the best value. When we do that, we can better meet our customer demands and increase sales.”

Meier Transmission in Cleveland, Ohio, faces the same challenges. Meier is Northeast Ohio's largest independent distributor of transmission, motion control and safety products. Tom Bohardt, president and CEO of Meier, explains why his company works with Cleveland's Cuyahoga Community College to create courses for its workers and potential workers: “Finding good people is fundamental to success in this industry. In the past, we've found them through referrals, but now we need to find new ways of attracting people with the right skills to this career path. Many distributors are asking themselves, Where do I go to find good people? This program is fundamental to successfully answering that question. I understand people who say there are only so many hours in a day, but if we are going to succeed and grow the business we need to always be thinking about ways to make the industry better. The number one key to any distributor's success is people. We need to find ways to make this an attractive career for people with 21st-century skills.

According to the National Association of Manufacturers' (NAM) *2006 Labor Report*, manufacturing production employment (factory floor) has increased for 10 consecutive months, the longest consecutive string of monthly gains in 10 years. Over the last 12 months, production employment increased by 170,000. But 90 percent of the respondents to NAM's 2005 Skills Gap survey said they couldn't find qualified production workers and that this had a serious impact on their ability to keep up productivity and serve customers.

America's manufacturing sector—more than any other—drives the economy and employs more than 14 million workers. Manufacturing production is at its highest point in history and without manufacturing, the U.S. economy would be in dire straights. Finding, hiring and training manufacturing workers is of paramount importance—and we need to involve our businesses in educating and training those workers who will lead manufacturing into the future and sustain it in the present.

Spokespeople can address:

- The changing face of American manufacturing;
- The importance of manufacturing to the U.S. economy;
- The need for skilled workers to keep facilities at capacity;
- The importance of working with schools on curricula that focus on math and science skills necessary for careers in manufacturing;
- The need to fill the pipeline with skilled workers to avoid an imminent workforce crisis in manufacturing; and
- The need to educate youth about rewarding new careers in modern manufacturing.

Sample Newsletter Articles

Chamber members are participating in an innovative program designed to meet employer needs by providing manufacturers in the Twin Cities region with well-trained entry-level employees who have the necessary skills for on-the-job success. The Minnesota “Make It Happen” metalforming skills program helps employers meet demands for a skilled workforce by connecting industry, education, workforce development service providers and potential employees.

“What’s unique about this program is that employers drive the demand and the content,” says Joe Fredkove, director of training and business development, Hennepin Technical College, which is carrying out the training effort. “Manufacturing companies are asking for highly focused training that prospective or newly hired employees can complete in a short timeframe. The intense, short-term curriculum ultimately places employees on a path for career development.”

Some 23 companies are actively supporting the effort, advising on the curriculum, sending employees through the training and participating in associated job fairs. The executives formed a “Super Advisory Group” to assure that the program meets their needs. Deborah Cooper, president of Rotation Engineering in Brooklyn Park, cochair of that group, says that “filling the pipeline” is an equally important goal. “We want entry-level workers to see that they can move up through the system and develop a rewarding career path within our company and this industry. We have to address our customers evolving needs for reasonable costs and faster response times, and we need a skilled workforce to do that.”

John Timmersman, president of Marshall Manufacturing, agrees: “We’re participating because we need a well-trained workforce in order to meet customer demands. We rely on highly skilled workers to meet our business objectives.”

Elizabeth Abraham, CEO of Top Tool, which received the 2005 “Small Business of the Year” award from the Metro North Chamber, also strongly endorses the program. “We believe that working in the manufacturing industry is a profession, and are committed to investing time and money on education and training for our employees to help them advance in a rewarding career path.” Abraham also believes this investment in training is helping to meet business objectives and having a positive impact on the bottom line. “Only with highly trained employees can we meet our goals of providing a quality product in a timely manner for the best value. When we do that, we can better meet our customer demands and increase sales.”

Erick Ajax, vice president of E.J. Ajax & Sons in Minneapolis and a member of the project’s core team, notes that this sector project ties closely to the Minnesota Manufacturing Coalition’s goals of attracting more people to careers in manufacturing and keeping manufacturing a vital part of Minnesota’s economy. “In its first year, the program has more than 60 graduates with most being able to find jobs and career ladders into our industry.”

Funding for the project is provided through the Center for Workforce Success at the National Association of Manufacturers’ Manufacturing Institute, the Annie Casey Foundation, the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, the Hitachi Foundation and the Precision Metalforming Association Educational Foundation.

For more information about the project, contact Elizabeth Abraham at TopTool (Elizabeth@toptool.com).

An innovative program is underway that will increase employment opportunities for local residents and improve the health of local industrial distributors in the Cleveland area. The Cleveland Industrial Careers PathwaySM (ICP) project is an employer-led effort being carried out by the Power Transmission Distributors Association (PTDA) Foundation and the Westside Industrial Retention and Expansion Network (WIRE-Net) to actively promote careers in the industrial distribution channel and help distributors and manufacturers enhance how they hire, train and promote employees.

Joan Cook, executive director of the PTDA Foundation, explains, “This effort responds to industrial distributors’ critical need for qualified employees and addresses their concern about growing a capable workforce ready to serve global customers.” In the first six months of the program, 27 students have enrolled and passed the Introduction to Industrial Distribution course at Cuyahoga Community College. In the coming months the Cleveland ICP hopes to enroll an additional 30 incumbent and new students, followed by placement and/or advancement at local companies.

The employer-driven focus of the training distinguishes it from other programs. Along with PTDA, WIRE-Net and Cuyahoga Community College, partners in the effort include the ICP Pathway Alliance of 23 local employer associations and their employer members. Community partners also include Cuyahoga County Workforce Development and the City of Cleveland Workforce Development.

Carl James, president & CEO of BDI, explains why his company is participating: “We have to find different ways of growing our talent pool. After all, we’re only as good as our talent. This program focuses on our industry in a way that makes potential employees more attuned to the specific challenges of this career path and the skills that are necessary to succeed.”

Communicating to youth about the rewarding career path available in industrial distribution is a priority for participating employers. According to Tom Bohardt, CEO of Meier Transmission, “We believe it’s an exciting industry to work in but the skills that are necessary to succeed are not necessarily intuitive.” James agrees: “I think the community colleges are filled with talented people who don’t know about our industry or the opportunities available.” Bohardt says industrial distribution is a large industry with great opportunities but much of the general public is not aware of what a distributor does. “This curriculum provides not just training but opportunities to learn about a rewarding career path.”

Funding for the Cleveland project is provided through the Center for Workforce Success at the National Association of Manufacturers’ Manufacturing Institute, The Annie Casey Foundation, The Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, The Hitachi Foundation, the PTDA Foundation and WIRE-Net.

For more information, contact the PTDA Foundation.

Selected Resources from the Center for Workforce Success (CWS)

Center for Workforce Success at the National Association of Manufacturers, www.nam.org/workforce

Business Champions for a Competitive Workforce Initiative:

Business Champions engage business leadership across the country to actively speak out and support policies that expand educational opportunities aimed at building a competitive U.S. workforce. (www.nam.org/workforce)

The Dream It. Do It. Manufacturing Careers Campaign:

Dream It. Do It. is a grassroots economic and workforce development initiative fostering growth, innovation and jobs for the next generation of American manufacturing talent. (www.dreamit-doit.org)

Filling America's Jobs Series:

Working with CEOs To Communicate the Importance of a Skilled Workforce in Sector Workforce Development; How Businesses Can Implement Sector Workforce Development Strategies for Jobs and Economic Growth; How Employer Associations Can Help Small Firms Be More Competitive by Improving the Productivity of Entry-Level Workers; How To Increase Supervisory Impact on Retention; A Guide for Public Workforce Professionals; and A Guide for Employers to Benefit from the Public Workforce System.

Improving Workplace Opportunities for Limited English-Speaking Workers:

This booklet details good practice models for employers interested in providing training and career ladders for their limited English-speaking workers, who strengthen their communities economically, socially and educationally. (2007)

The 2005 Skills Gap Report: A Survey of the American Manufacturing Workforce:

The results of this survey provide a picture of the broadening gap in the availability of skilled workers and the employee performance requirements of 21st-century manufacturing. (2006)

The Retention and Advancement Demonstration Project: A Win-Win for Manufacturers and Their Workers at Entry and Near-Entry Levels:

This case study describes how the retention and advancement of low-skilled incumbent workers can be measurably enhanced if employer organizations work closely with businesses to improve their human resource policies and practices. (2005)

How To Become a Workforce Intermediary:

This brochure describes the key components of the employer association role as a workforce intermediary. (2003)

The Role of the Workforce Intermediary:

This CD-ROM visually demonstrates the importance of regional collaboration—driven by the business community and its partners—to train and retain the worker pipeline. (2003)



THE CENTER FOR WORKFORCE SUCCESS

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