



Machining

White Paper: Fix the Labor Shortage? Embrace Millennials and Gen Z

Don Sears | Sep 04, 2018

Generations who grew up using technology with ease may just be the ticket to solving the skills gap. Companies who refresh their outlook and career development planning to fully embrace millennial and Generation Z workers have the best chance, according to a Tooling U-SME white paper that examines the issue in great detail.

There are 75 million millennial workers available to companies, according to the Pew Research Center. Right behind them, there are another 61 million "Generation Z" job seekers about to enter the workforce—*finds* consulting firm BridgeWorks. Knowing that there is the infamous 2 million to 3.5 million manufacturing skills gap—per the oft-cited Deloitte millennial surveys, it would seem that manufacturers that capture a fraction of those numbers would easily solve the skills gap—but it's not as easy as it sounds.

Perceptions about manufacturing as a dirty, unhealthy and limiting career path abound. Also, manufacturing simply seems like the work of a different generation that is perhaps out of touch with now. Despite the adoption of so many emerging automation technologies and the incredible use of programming to operate CNC machines—and the rise of sensor-based technology, negative perceptions are real.

"Dark, dirty and dangerous—mention the 3Ds of old-time manufacturing and HR managers shudder," *writes* Steve Minter, executive editor of IndustryWeek. "It's exactly the image they don't want the public—or millennials considering careers in manufacturing—to have of the industry."

Similarly, manufacturers' viewpoints about millennials and Generation Z aren't all that rosy either—but it does not have to be that way.

"While most manufacturers (78 percent) agree millennials are important to their future operations, less than half (40 percent) say they have a good understanding of this group of employees," writes Tooling U-SME in its white paper "*Embracing Millennials: Closing the Manufacturing Skills Gap and Gaining a Competitive Advantage.*"

Why Tooling U-SME?

Tooling U-SME delivers versatile, competency-based learning and development solutions to the manufacturing community, working with thousands of companies including more than half of all Fortune 500 manufacturers, as well as 600 educational institutions across the country. Tooling U-SME partners with customers to build high performers who help their companies drive quality, profitability, productivity, innovation and employee satisfaction.

To download the “Embracing Millennials” white paper, *[please go here](#)*.

Tooling U-SME helps manufacturers with their career development plans—and monitors the data and industry very closely. The organization does not subscribe to the perceptions of the industry or by it about new generations of workers.

“Companies that take a fresh look at their training and development approaches can ultimately elevate the performance of everyone in an organization—not just millennials—leading to loyal employees and stronger business results,” notes Tooling U-SME.

“Every year, the skills gap is an issue for us manufacturers,” says Reid Leland, president and founder of LeanWerks, a precision manufacturer in Ogden, Utah. “Regardless, we have to take responsibility for our workforce. We can’t make excuses for not having good people—we have to be active in our communities, helping to grow and attract talent.”

Leland knows what he is talking about. His company has won Top Shop awards for its human resources practices—which includes using Tooling U-SME and other industry standard best practices for training and career development.

To get Leland’s full perspective, read “Q&A: How to Recruit, Train and Retain Top Machining and Manufacturing Talent.”

Millennials Are More Optimistic Than Other Generations About Manufacturing

“There’s no doubt companies are anxious to fill positions,” notes Tooling U-SME. Its research found 8 out of 10 manufacturers are worried about meeting their workforce needs within the next several years.

Digging into additional data, it becomes a little bit clearer that manufacturing is actually viewed a bit more positively by up-and-coming generations than you might think. Vicki Holt, CEO of Protolabs, touts 2016 research her company commissioned to study what’s actually going on.

“Thirty-seven percent of millennials think of manufacturing as being a high-tech career choice, which is significantly more than baby boomers (23 percent),” writes Holt in the article “**Key to Closing Manufacturing Skills Gap? Optimistic Millennials.**”

Holt also points out that nearly half of millennials “think there will be enough qualified professionals to fill the manufacturing industry’s job demands in the next 10 years.” Only 35 percent of Gen Xers and baby boomers think jobs will be filled.

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Jennifer Stogran

Human Resources, Weiler Corp.

Leveraging Career Development Plans for Millennials and Gen Z Manufacturing Workers

What's the best way to attract and get new generations of workers into manufacturing?

"We have to dazzle them," says Jennifer Stogran, a human resources coordinator at Weiler Corp. who is featured in the Tooling U-SME white paper. "We are learning that to attract millennials, we have to create an experience and provide a development path they can see."

"Let them see the vision and become part of the organization," advises Mark C. Perna, the founder of Tools for Schools, which specializes in career and technical education. "Shut them off and they will turn away."

Perna is also featured in the Tooling U-SME white paper—and believes newer generations of manufacturing workers show a strong affinity for technology, which can be harnessed to a company and an employee's advantage.

"A love and comfort with technology can be a benefit for manufacturers who tap into their ease with technology, whether through integrating approaches like online training or enlisting millennials to help coach older colleagues on technical aspects of the job, which frequently change due to the accelerated pace of technological advancements in automation and digital manufacturing," explains Tooling U-SME.

Beyond technology, career development specialists—and companies like LeanWerks who have implemented formal apprenticeship training—also find that newer generations want clarity on how they fit in the organization and how they can develop on the job.

"Like most employees, millennials succeed when they are motivated from within—when they're the right workers, in the right jobs, for the right reasons," says Perna. "When they feel the branch creak beneath them and catch the urgency of their own dreams, they will create their own success."

How is your company embracing newer generations of workers? Are you formalizing your plans? Share your stories.

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