

Job Connection

Developing Strong Talent in Your Fabrication Shop

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Historically, the trend has been for metal companies to put process over people. The manufacturing industry's shortage of workers with the necessary skills (also known as the "*skills gap*"), however, is forcing companies to allocate resources back to their workforce.

For many companies, this means changing the way they train and maintain talent, whether that means beefing up training programs or rethinking their hiring tactics. Rockwell Automation, for example, is working to recruit military veterans and leverage their unique skill sets. "We've been able to develop a truly groundbreaking program that will help solve a challenge critical to fueling the future growth of the manufacturing sector," Blake Moret, CEO of Rockwell Automation, states *here* in a press release. "Military veterans possess a unique combination of technical savvy and core work skills that makes them well-positioned for careers in today's advanced manufacturing environments."

Companies are also reevaluating how they are maintaining their talent. As lean manufacturing expert Jamie Flinchbaugh says *here* in *IndustryWeek*, you can't "just hire talent and then leave it alone." Continuous improvement applies to all areas of an operation, including training and maintaining talent.

According to Flinchbaugh, when it comes to building a strong team, manufacturers should consider the following:

1. **Put the right talent in the right place.** Hiring is part of this, but so is organizational design. Too often Flinchbaugh says he sees organizations reward talent by taking them out of the place they perform the best. That's like taking your best hitter on the team and making them a team coach before their retirement as a reward. So top salespeople become sales managers, and top engineers become engineering managers. Is that the best use of their talent?
2. **Talent is responsible for its own improvement.** Your talent should hold the primary responsibility for their own development. A lean thinker should be encouraged to improve their talent in any skill that matters, whether personal or professional.
3. **Coach and train.** Making the development of talent a core part of your business means integrating it into your management systems. This is not something to delegate to human resources. The hardest part of this is how you leverage your top talent. While not everyone is suited to coaching and training, leveraging your top talent to build more talent is the long-term play.

In a metal-working environment, it is also critical that operators and other employees feel valued. While the idea of empowering employees sounds a bit cliché, a growing number of managers are finding that operators who take ownership of their process or work area are invaluable. According to the brief, "*Strategies for Training and Maintaining Talent in Industrial Metal-Cutting Organizations*," operator "buy-in" can positively affect all aspects of an industrial metal-cutting operation, including quality, productivity, and in the end, the bottom line. Similarly, when employees feel disconnected, those same business areas can be negatively affected. Strategies such as collecting feedback, goal setting, and incentives are good ways to encourage employee ownership from the start.

As the skills gap has proven, investing in talent is just as important as investing in technology and process. Metal-cutting companies—not to mention the manufacturing industry at large—can't afford to neglect one of its greatest assets. In the end, building and cultivating high-quality talent is necessary for building and cultivating high-quality services and products.

Read more about the skills gap here.

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