FEATURE

By Dan Squires and Pauline Case

Recruiting High School Students into Tech Programs

MAKING HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS AWARE OF THE OPPORTUNITIES AVAILABLE TO THEM **CAN BUILD ENROLLMENT IN COMMUNITY COLLEGE TECHNICAL PROGRAMS AND HELP MEET THE NATION'S WORKFORCE NEEDS.**

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INDUSTRY'S NEEDS FOR HIGHLY SKILLED WORKERS are not currently being met. Six years ago, Ira S. Wolfe wrote about a looming crisis in manufacturing in his *Business to Business* article, "The Perfect Labor Storm," in which he warned that, in the 21st century, the U.S. would have too few workers with the technical skills to run our factories. Those predictions are a fact today.

Our nation needs more than a half-million people in our skilled worker training programs now. Not enough young people are choosing to be trained in these areas, and compounding this problem is the reality that the average age of our current skilled labor force is 55—ready for retirement soon. These manufacturing jobs not only pay well, but they tend to create a cascade of other jobs. Industry should not have to import skilled employees from other countries or relocate to foreign soil to have access to a qualified workforce.

Recruiting high school students into technical programs is crucial. In the past, older workers would come to tech schools for retraining. However, as the job market strengthens, these workers are more able to find employment when layoffs occur and are less likely to seek formal training for new skills.

For example, high school students have represented only about a third of our local machinist trainees in the past. To increase the number of high school students in all our tech programs two major obstacles must be overcome. One, high school counselors must realize the earnings potential of technical workers and how important these skilled workers are to the nation's economy. Two, more students must learn about the work of skilled technicians, the opportunities for advancement or the possible incomes. Using successful recruiting techniques is a key to overcoming these problems.

A High School Classroom Visit

Typically, a college is invited to visit a high school for recruiting a limited number of times. Furthermore, the time that can be allotted each college is very short, and usually the amount of time for explaining each program offered is only a few minutes. To "sell" an unfamiliar program requires 30 to 50 minutes, so something more must be arranged.

One very successful approach is using a classroom visit. Contacting a career-minded high school instructor can give you the necessary opportunity. Be sure to include instructors of upper-level math, science, computers and drafting, as students who are competent in these areas are often highly successful in technical careers.

Once in the high school classroom, use a multimedia approach and keep things moving. It is a good idea to have a video of what goes on in a shop, or better yet, a video of a product being manufactured. As machine tool technology and CAM programming are

my focus, I use a video displaying a small cup being machined on a CNC lathe.

Do not rely on a taped narration, but do a live discussion with the students about what is happening in the video. After the video, I have enough cups to give to the whole class. This usually gets them thinking about other production possibilities.

It is also helpful to bring one of the students in your program with you to answer questions or add appropriate comments. Bringing a representative from industry to discuss the industry's needs and the occupation will also give the students more knowledge of the field. Remember, few students will opt for training in an unfamiliar career, especially if they found the introduction to it tedious.

The Importance of Follow-up

Following this classroom visit, it is advisable to have a day that these students can visit your institution. Make the most of this visit. It is ideal if the students can tour the facility that houses the equipment used by each tech program, allowing students to watch and learn what each occupation is about.

In 19 years of planning recruitment procedures, I have found it pays to involve the current tech trainees. As current students demonstrate tasks on different machines, small groups of three or four visitors, rotate from demonstration to demonstration, spending approximately five minutes at each station. It is wise to keep the total number of visitors in the shop to about 20 at a time.

The whole procedure needs to be well organized and controlled; visitors are not roaming and exploring unsupervised. With the students doing the demonstrations, the instructor's time must be used solely to manage the whole process. The trainees enjoy showing their skills (be sure these students have thoroughly practiced their operations), and visitors ask more questions of the student demonstrators.

When the follow-up visit cannot be in the actual tech center, I use computer simulations, videos, current students and visiting speakers. This approach can be especially effective with counselors, principals or teachers present. Again, keep the large group to about 20 visiting students and keep the presentation time to about 15 to 30 minutes.

For videos of the different occupations, the federal government has a large library for educators to download and use. Explore the following Web site: **www.careervoyages.gov/careervideos-main.cfm**. I use five of these; each is just 90 seconds long.

With several different people speaking to the group for a short time and keeping the information at a minimum, the students pay more attention and show more interest. Representatives from industry tell of the need for graduates, representatives from funding entities explain how to get financial help, and current students set up computers to allow the visiting students to run a simple CNC program.

At the end of the presentation, each visiting student gets a small souvenir prepared earlier on a CNC machine (a small cup or college mascot medallion). These little souvenirs can be better than business cards, as students show them to other students and talk about their experiences on tech day.

A Valuable Effort

Some instructors are concerned about lost teaching time during these technology days. However, if current students do the demonstrations, they will work harder than ever to perfect their short presentations. These students are always proud to show what they can do with the machines, and they are your best salesmen.

Industry needs this trained, younger workforce, and young people need information about technical careers that are both gratifying and financially rewarding.

Successful recruiting takes careful preparation, but the obvious interest and positive comments from both the visiting instructors and their students are precursors to a higher enrollment. That makes it worth the effort. T

To Learn More

For more information about the machine tool program at Cowley College, visit **www.cowley.edu/departments/it/machinetool/index.html.**

For videos and other resources from Career Voyages, visit **www.careervoyages.gov/careervideos-main.cfm.**

The *Occupational Outlook Handbook* of the U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics has job statistics on machinists, computer-control programmers and operators, and tool and die makers.
For more information, visit **www.bls.gov/oco/ocos223.htm.**

For more information about the *Business to Business* article, "Labor Storm Watch," by Ira S. Wolfe, visit **www.perfectlaborstorm.com.**