



# THE POWER OF MICROMESSAGES IN MARKETING, RECRUITMENT AND SUCCESS IN CTE

By Ben Williams

## AS STATE AGENCIES AND INDIVIDUAL INSTITUTIONS FOCUS EFFORTS TO MORE EFFECTIVELY MARKET AND

recruit more students into career and technical education (CTE) programs and pathways, it is critical to consider how those messages are being received by prospective students, their families the educators who work with and serve them.

- Do the messages resonate?
- Are they relevant to an individual's lived experiences?
- Does someone see people with whom

they can relate as successful in that career pathway or the industry it leads to?

- Are cultural stereotypes being re-inforced in the message or is the education and career narrative being broadened and expanded?

These are important questions to consider in assessing whether one's marketing strategy and approach is reaching the full spectrum of students and families.

Putting an emphasis on equity and diversity in one's marketing efforts will maximize access, reach and return on investment relative to broadening participation in CTE, especially in high-skill, high-wage and high-demand career pathways. Many of the fastest growing occupations — and some of the most rewarding — are in nontraditional fields. Such occupations, defined as career fields in which one gender comprises less than 25 percent of the workforce (Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Improvement Act, 2006), include women in

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construction, the skilled trades, manufacturing, engineering or information technology; and men in many health occupations and early childhood education. Although there have been gradual increases in some occupations, many remain segregated by sex. Therefore, students' career choices may be limited by gendered stereotypes that discourage them from considering the full range and spectrum of careers based on their interests, skills and dreams — stereotypes that are often inadvertently reinforced in marketing for secondary and higher education programs.

### The NAPE Micromessaging Cultural Framework

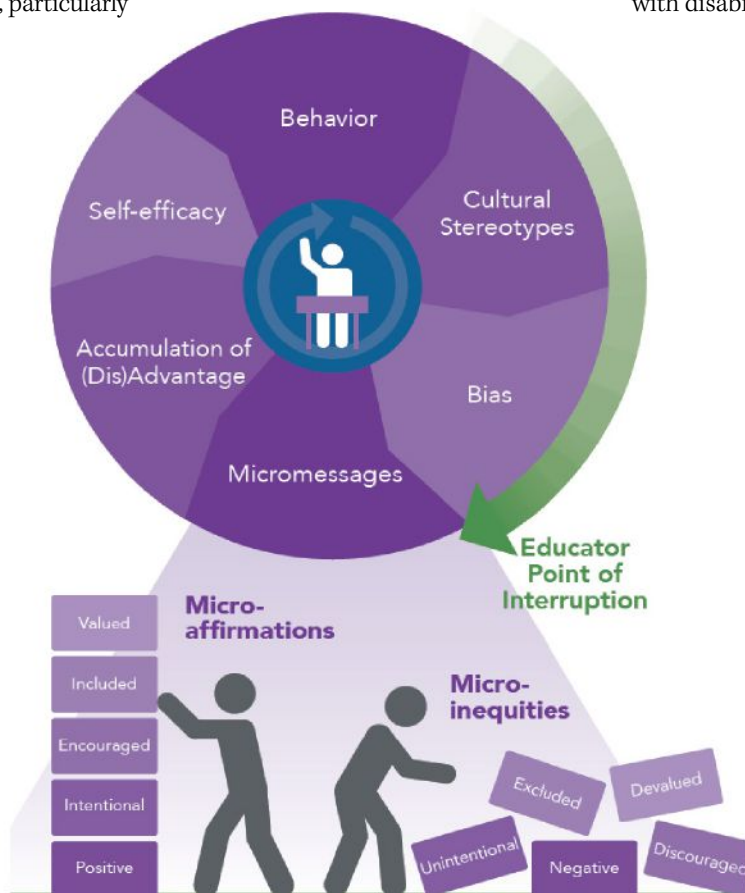
The under-representation of students in nontraditional career preparation programs continues, today, due in part to the ineffectiveness of strategies that fail to address key cultural factors creating barriers to participation.

Culture shapes our beliefs and forms our biases about people based on their age, gender, race, language, (dis)ability, class or income level without our realization. We communicate our biases through subtle, but often powerful messages called micromessages, which can affect a person's self-efficacy, or their belief in their ability to be successful in a program, course, college or career.

Micromessages can be expressed in in the form of a gesture, word choice, treatment or even tone of voice. They can also be communicated contextually in the materials of a classroom, in the information shared on a website, in a poster or brochure, or in the examples given relative to a career pathway.

In response, the National Alliance for Partnerships in Equity (NAPE) introduced a model of change called the Micromessaging Culture Wheel (Morrell and Parker, 2013). By addressing cultural inequities through self-awareness, multicultural understanding, and understandable and adaptable strategies that move micromessages from micro-inequities (negative but often unintentional) to micro-affirmations (positive and intentional), educators will build student self-efficacy. This will then lead to improved student outcomes, particularly

among students in nontraditional occupational pathways, those who often face the greatest cultural biases affecting career choice. Using this model as a guide, educators can intentionally examine and even interrogate their marketing and messaging to identify whether there are unintentional messages that might discourage the participation of students, especially students from groups historically underrepresented in different CTE pathways by gender, race and ethnicity, and/or special population status, including students with disabilities.





## An Inclusive Messaging Strategy

In 2015, The Ohio Construction Advisory Council was formed to bring together leaders in education and industry, in order to broaden the participation of Ohio citizens in the state's booming construction industry. Subcommittees for marketing and equity were formed with the intention to focus on broadening participation for women, people of color, and people from other historically under-represented groups in construction. Through its work with the Ohio Department of Education (ODE), NAPE was invited to meet with the council and an idea was born to bridge the work groups around a new guidebook designed to broaden students', families' and educators' lenses to view and understand ca-

reers in construction and the pathways that lead to them.

The focus of the guidebook, titled *Build Your Future: Ohio's Construction Industry* (NAPEEF, 2016), was to inspire excitement about construction careers and the pathways, through CTE and workforce development, that lead to them. As the guidebook took shape, opportunities emerged to use it to bridge messaging around CTE, registered apprenticeships and career pathways. The Ohio State Apprenticeship Council and Governor's Office of Workforce Transformation were enlisted for additional feedback and support, and the final product includes information about the industry, affordable CTE pathways and apprenticeship opportunities. Each of these pathways is made real and accessible through the

narratives of Ohio students who have been successful.

Throughout the planning and production process, we recognized the importance of inclusive messaging that would build students' self-efficacy in considering and pursuing a career pathway in construction or a related industry. We also wanted to build educators' capacity to share this information and in ways that would be relevant to their disciplines, both within and outside of CTE. Thus was born the *Build Their Futures* companion guidebook for educators, which comprises the same materials as the one designed for students and their families, but also includes specific lesson plans that teachers and counselors can use in their classrooms and programs to reinforce those messages; help students

### ➞ Meet Monica.

Monica Betts attended a two-year electrical program at C-TEC of Licking County while in high school. In her senior year she secured a registered apprenticeship that led to full-time employment after she graduated.

"I am in an industry, a local (union), and with a contractor that want[s] me personally to succeed to my full potential. I am currently entering my third year of apprenticeship classes, and am immensely grateful to the institutions in place that have allowed me to pursue being a journeyman. I am earning an associate's [degree] through Columbus State Community College simultaneously, and at no expense to me.

**Once I finish my apprenticeship, I also intend to continue my education, using our local (union)'s generous education fund to pursue a bachelor's in project management, and eventually, earn a degree in electrical engineering."**

Monica



explore careers through resources unique to Ohio, such as OhioMeansJobs; and identify specific pathways to help them to pursue CTE.

In 2017, the construction guidebooks were followed by the new *Make Their Futures* series focused on manufacturing careers and pathways (NAPEEF, 2017). Building on the success of the first, the educator version includes specific research-based strategies to foster an equitable learning environment in the classroom.

All of these guidebooks are housed on the Nape and ODE websites, where students, families and educators can access and use them. Through Nape's partnership with the Ohio Department of Education's Office of Career-Technical Education, we have actively marketed these tools through state conferences and meetings and through social media. In 2018, we will make an even more concerted effort to get these resources into schools and career centers throughout the state.

The messaging and marketing strategy described above is powerful, in that it changes the narrative and the script. It is intentional in broadening the lens through which students, their families and the educators who serve them look at the construction and manufacturing industries, and does so in a way that affirms students' exploration of these pathways that may be outside of a perceived norm. A marketing strategy that leverages guidebooks such as those described here replaces the unintentional micro-inequities that may discourage students from considering or pursuing an educational or career path with very intentional micro-affirmations that strive to resonate with students' interests and lived experiences. The messaging also reinforces the affordability of those pathways, striving to mitigate barriers to higher education for students, especially those from low-income backgrounds, who may fear that college is too expensive. By putting equity at the center of a messaging and marketing strategy, educators and their partners can ensure that every student has access to, and understanding of, the full spectrum of opportunities through CTE pathways. ■

UNITED STATES

**12.3 million**

work in manufacturing jobs<sup>9</sup>

OHIO

**1 in 8 jobs**

are in manufacturing making Ohio 3<sup>rd</sup> in nation<sup>21</sup>

WOMEN IN MANUFACTURING

**29%**

of manufacturing workers are women<sup>1</sup>

## Dream It!

Manufacturing careers include creativity, caring, and collaboration, three Cs that have been connected to motivation and engagement for many students, especially women and students of color.<sup>9</sup> What kinds of students would like a career in manufacturing?



STUDENTS WHO ENJOY turning ideas into reality



STUDENTS WHO WANT TO make life easier for others



STUDENTS WHO ENJOY problem-solving with a team



STUDENTS WHO ENJOY working with advanced technologies

Manufacturing is an exciting, creative and high-tech field. Advanced manufacturing technologies will help the United States lead the world in innovation, job growth, and a healthy economy. Every day manufacturers are using new processes and materials to make products safer, less expensive, and easier to use, which is better for all consumers. We can also now manufacture products on-demand to reduce waste, which is better for the environment. Members on a manufacturing team are creative and collaborate to make safe products that simplify tasks or just make life easier.

Due to the growing demand, connecting students to career pathways in manufacturing can help them find jobs with

competitive pay, terrific health benefits, free postsecondary opportunities, and plenty of potential for advancement. Educational requirements vary significantly, and pathways start as early as middle school and include high school programs, apprenticeships, certificates and associate degrees, and four-year bachelor's degrees. Students can major in many fields to prepare for manufacturing, including: engineering (mechanical, electrical, industrial, chemical, or process engineering), robotics, food science, clothing and textiles, computer systems, life science, physical science, physics, information technology, and business studies.

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