

# Internships are the key to closing the manufacturing skills gap

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Manufacturing is making a comeback in the United States. However, challenges remain, and a key challenge is the lack of skilled labor.

According to recent reports, US manufacturers still cannot find enough skilled labor. There are two key reasons – technology and a lack of interest. Shop floor machinery no longer consists of cogs, gears, levers and pulleys. They are sophisticated computers – in and of themselves – and they require highly skilled labor to operate and maintain. Manufacturing is becoming a STEM career, and U.S. students compare very poorly in international comparisons of math and science skills.

The other key reason is interest. Today's high school students and younger workers simply do not look to the manufacturing sector for employment. The jobs just do not seem glamorous. However, if these same workers/students knew more about these jobs, many would find them to be amazing opportunities...in many cases, with a much better ROI than white-collar jobs requiring advanced degrees.

Now, when the skill gap is combined with the extremely high unemployment (and underemployment) found among young adults, you have the makings of a potentially perfect program to bridge the gap – the manufacturing internship. Paid internships can provide a key benefit to unemployed / underemployed workers and students.

For the young workers, the internship experience is invaluable. They overcome their trepidation – no one wants to be responsible for shutting down a production line – and built rapport with a company that is probably the biggest employer in their area. They are exposed to different areas in a manufacturing environment, get hands on training, build relationships and (for many) are presented with a reason to stay in school.

Best of all, many have discovered an interest in manufacturing....one that did not exist before.

Both the employer and the intern can effectively test drive each other.

However, there are some challenges with internships in the manufacturing environment. Some of these include:

1. Being able to utilize a group of qualified mentors to work with the interns.
2. Union rules which prohibit interns from stepping directly onto the shop floor.
3. Location, location, location. Many times large manufacturing facilities are simply not accessible to young workers / students via public transit.
4. Small to medium sized manufacturers (many times) are not set up to have interns on their shop floors.
5. Young adults who are also parents, live in rural areas or face other barriers to employment are not able to actively participate in many internship programs.

At Snelling, we know manufacturing. We have 60+ years placing qualified individuals with leading manufacturers across the country. We work with key technical schools across the country and help our clients find the best workers year in and year out. Contact us today!