

Manufacturing leadership and the changing workforce

Establishing and retaining a highly skilled team of maintenance professionals is essential for manufacturers to meet performance objectives and budgetary goals.

Changes in the workforce

“The biggest thing affecting manufacturing is the job market and attrition,” said Chris Bakos, director of recruiting and technical training at **Advanced Technology Services Inc. (ATS)**. “The Great Resignation began early last year [2021]. That caused a lot of disruption in manufacturing. In the beginning of 2022, there were more than four million people who quit their jobs.”

Bakos said there’s always been churn in the job market. “With COVID, many people stayed in place; there’s a lot of pent-up demand. That was a factor early on when we started seeing the resignations. People are looking for better opportunities and there are a lot out there — in the beginning of 2022, there were 11 million open jobs.”

Attrition affects costs as well. “The biggest thing is dealing with attrition from the hot job market,” Bakos said. “There are costs with that type of disruption, whether it’s experiencing lack of production output due to not being able to run various lines within your factory due to lack of staffing or having to recruit and train new talent.”

How the skills gap affects manufacturers

Much of today’s maintenance workforce is retiring, creating a challenging skills gap. As they leave the workforce, they take with them technical



skills and knowledge that took decades to develop. The industry is also faced with having many in the younger generations choosing different career paths outside of manufacturing.

“The number of people choosing a job or career in manufacturing is a lot less than it was 20 years ago,” Bakos said. “Many plants are high tech these days. It takes people who are technically skilled and have had extensive training to maintain the equipment.”

That candidate pool is much smaller. Manufacturers may need to find talent that may not have had direct experience and train them to close that gap.”

ATS put together a robust technician development program and has had great results. The process helps people with limited technical and maintenance experience to progress from an entry level technician to a mid-level technician within 36 months. “We’ve always had a great program for developing our technicians,” Bakos

said. “But we decided that if we standardized our program, it would provide our technicians a set career path for not only growing their skillsets, but also their careers within ATS.”



Making training a priority

The development programs at ATS are built around a 70/20/10 learning model; 70% is on the job training, 20% is coaching/mentoring and 10% is classroom or online training. “Our SkillPoint™ technical training program, which focuses on industrial maintenance, involves using simulators for troubleshooting PLCs [programmable logic controllers], hydraulics, robotics and more,” Bakos said.

“The bulk of our programs are focused on getting our technician experience with industry-specific equipment they’re working on every day at the plant. We pair them with another ATS technician to work side-by-side and provide mentorship,” Bakos said.

ATS monitors progress in 56 categories. “We tailor the development plans to each technician based on where their gaps are,” Bakos said.

Recruiting exceptional talent

“Our recruiting team is robust and skilled at finding quality candidates,” Bakos said. “We use various tools and technologies, through channels such as job boards, social media or trade/technical schools and community colleges.”

ATS also has always highly valued and won numerous awards for being a military friendly company; roughly 20% of the organization are current military or veterans. “We’ve focused on individuals from the military because they typically match our culture of continuous improvement. They also have the technical fundamentals we’re looking for, which allows them onboard quickly and start delivering results for our manufacturing customers,” Bakos said.

Focus on culture

Manufacturing leaders can reverse the skills gap and attrition. “Manufacturers need to focus on the people they have. They need to take care of their current workforce and invest in developing and training them. Employees want to see how to get from point A to point B,” Bakos said. “They’re not as patient as they used to be. Keep trying to push them forward. Invest in the valuable employees you have, and it will hopefully make them long-term within your organization.”

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Advanced Technology Services, Inc. (ATS), is a leading industrial services provider with over three decades of proven experience in technology-driven industrial maintenance and MRO asset management. Through a technically skilled workforce, best-in-class processes, and Industry 4.0 technologies we deliver improved asset performance and productivity to many leading process and discrete manufacturers.