

Local businesses should appeal to next generation of workers

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Recent newspaper headlines underscore the double whammy of retiring baby boomers and a shrinking pool of replacement workers: "Workforce Shortage Looms,"



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"Workforce Pipeline Under Pressure," "The Talent Crunch."

A "workforce pipeline" defines the supply of new and replacement workers entering the work force.

How much thought do you give to where your future employees will come from?

Skilled-worker shortages are already being felt. Local businesses report that jobs in manufacturing, health care, science, transportation, education and utilities are increasingly difficult to fill.

Not surprisingly, these industries all have an older work force.

Many young people entering the work force are unaware of the diversity of exciting career opportunities available in Lane County. Businesses risk losing locally grown talent unless they reach out to them while they are in high school — or even middle school.

So how are local businesses connecting with young people?

Career fairs

Lane County schools offer several career fairs in the spring. Hosted by the Lane Educational Service District, the Lane County Youth Career Fair attracts more than 2,000 high school students from 16 area school districts.

Some local districts conduct smaller scale fairs for their own students. Cottage Grove High School has a career/job fair, and Lane Community College sponsors one for its students. In addition, the Springfield Chamber of Commerce hosts a middle school fair.

These fairs are an excellent opportunity to reach out to young people both as a business and as a representative of your industry.

The key to success at these events is to go beyond a bowl of candy as

a draw and engage students in some actual hands-on activities.

The Lane County RV Consortium has hosted a booth at the Lane County Youth Career Fair for several years.

It brings a full-size luxury motor coach and offers interactive activities, including electrical wiring, cabinet construction and a computer-based table saw experience.

Internships and job shadowing

Businesses can make a stronger connection with students through internships and job shadows. Internships give high school students opportunities to experience hands-on training in specific work skills. They can be paid or unpaid and typically involve about 20 hours per week for 10 to 12 weeks.

If you are interested in hosting a high school intern, contact Paula Medaglia at the Lane Workforce Partnership (682-7225 or at paula.medaglia@co.lane.or.us).

Job shadowing encourages a student to observe an employee working in a field of interest for several hours or a full day.

For job shadows, contact Mark Wreath (461-8253, mwreath@lane.k12.or.us) at the Lane Education Service District.

More than 2,000 students and 800 employers participate annually in internships in a broad range of disciplines through Lane Community College's Cooperative Education Program.

For more information on those program, check out www.lanec.edu/cooped or call 463-5203.

Industry tours

Increase your business visibility by offering tours to student groups.

These tours offer students a visual picture and expose them to career

options they may not have considered.

As an employer, you have the opportunity to emphasize the types of skills you're looking for and the types of benefits you offer. Mark Wreath at the Lane Education Service District can help organize tours.

You can also contact high schools in your area and speak with the principal or School-to-Work Coordinator.

Connections with the classroom

Get to know your local high schools and community college. You will find courses that relate directly to your business or industry. Consider the idea of giving presentations in these classes, donating supplies or equipment, or sponsoring a class project.

Many programs welcome businesses that serve in an advisory capacity. What better way to impact how well students are prepared for jobs in your industry?

Fall is fast approaching. It's a great time of year to start making connections. High school diploma requirements mandate that every student participate in career-related learning experiences.

Community college students often are looking for résumé-building experience that complements their field of study.

The career exposure that students receive today will help them prepare for their futures and will help local employers get to know and shape their future work force.

It's never too early to start building your pipeline of workers.

The Lane Workforce Partnership is a work force development organization dedicated to assisting employers recruit and retain employees, and to help individuals find employment and progress in their careers. To comment on this column or suggest future topics, contact Robin Onaclea, Business Services Coordinator at (541) 682-7224 or robino@laneworkforce.org.