

Taking a Closer Look at Apprenticeship Programs and the Job Market

By E. Lander Medlin

It may be heresy for an educational association to say that not all individuals need a college degree. However, if you are representing facilities professionals at higher education institutions (as APPA does), the story is a bit different. As a matter of fact, I was motivated for the topic of this column after having listened to and read the materials from APPA's monthly webinar series with Chris Kopach and Jenna Elmer on December 7, 2017. The title was *Setting up a Facilities Management Apprenticeship Program for Seamless Succession Planning*. You can view their webinar and access the PowerPoint presentation on APPA's website (www.appa.org/webinarseries/appa_monthly_webinars.cfm). Their material deserves another look and a short recap.

BRIDGING THE SKILLS GAP WITH APPRENTICESHIPS

The rate of Baby Boomer retirements has escalated and tipped the balance appreciably on higher education facilities departments' ability to replace its skilled trades personnel. In addition, the construction industry sector continues to grow and provides another job pool for an already diminished bank of skilled trades workers. Plus, fewer and fewer 19-25 year olds are entering the trades – down from 18 percent in 2006 – and even fewer perceive this path as a viable alternative to achieving their long-term financial goals. Yet, nothing could be further from the truth.

One of the keys to solving this perception problem and associated skills gap is to establish and offer apprenticeship programs. Certainly, both presidents (Obama, now Trump) have allocated funds for federal apprenticeship programs. Community colleges



are increasingly becoming engaged in delivering a curriculum wrapped around apprenticeships. In fact, the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) president, Walter Bumphus, met with the White House staff this past fall focused on ramping up delivery of curricula for apprenticeship programs in the skilled trades and manufacturing sector (along with numerous other occupations) across community colleges.

Yet, there are other viable collaborative partnerships – local high schools, vocational education schools, and last, but certainly not least, the military and their veterans transitioning programs. APPA is presently working with the Society of Military Engineers (SAME), NAVFAC (Navy SeaBees and the

CEC), and the DoD/Pentagon's Transition to Veterans Program to establish entry by these highly skilled professionals into the education sector and facilities management.

Given the situation, numerous colleges and universities facilities departments have doubled down on the creation of apprenticeship programs to address the looming trades' positions gap. Certainly employees gain invaluable on-the-job training and technical education while earning a solid wage. Employers address critical workforce shortages head-on while achieving knowledge transfer, better recruitment targets, and the potential for improved retention rates as the employer who cared enough to make this offering available in the first place.

THE "NEW COLLAR" FM WORKER

To add to the mix in this discussion, is the change to jobs/skillset that is coming to our facilities environment, let alone its impact on higher education. There are three areas where we should be mindful: A.I. (artificial intelligence), robotics, and data analytics and modeling; thereby, creating "New Collar" workers in the maintenance and repair industry.

The job impact is such that by 2038 one-third of the jobs will be transitioned, one-third will be eliminated or reduced, and one-third will not be affected. That's the "New Collar" revolution. Something to consider further.

PROACTIVE SUCCESSION PLANNING

Frankly, apprenticeship programs demonstrate succession planning and management at its best – a proactive approach to a very real and impending problem. To get a handle on this issue at your institution and in your department, assess your specific needs. Identify the number and type of retirements and turnover, and the trades positions needed/required to deliver appropriate maintenance and repair services. After taking a closer look at your own needs, recognize the opportunity you might also gain from

establishing a viable apprenticeship program.

For more information, visit the APPA website. In addition, check out the University of Arizona and the University of Virginia for two great examples of viable apprenticeship programs in place today. ☛

Lander Medlin is APPA's executive vice president and can be reached at lander@appa.org.

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