

Manufacturing's Workforce Revolution

# Why People Power the Future





Manufacturing has long powered the world's progress—fueling innovation, driving exports, and creating millions of jobs. But today, the industry stands at a pivotal crossroads. The reality is stark: **by 2033, experts predict a shortfall of 3.8 million manufacturing workers**. As seasoned professionals retire, a new generation is stepping in—bringing fresh expectations around flexibility, purpose, and technology. Meanwhile, digital transformation is rewriting the rules.



# The Talent Gap: More Than Just Numbers

Automation, AI, and connected systems are raising the bar for adaptability and technical fluency, redefining what it takes to succeed in modern manufacturing.

Yet within this challenge lies a powerful opportunity. Manufacturers who rethink and realign their workforce strategies to meet evolving employee expectations can not only close the talent gap, but also build organizations that are more resilient, agile, and poised to lead the industry into the future.

As the talent gap widens, the stakes for manufacturers get higher. Productivity, quality, and innovation are all at risk—and the old playbook of competitive pay and traditional hiring simply isn't enough.

Today's workforce expects more than just a paycheck. Employee well-being, culture, career growth, and shared values now top the list of priorities. In fact, according to BDO research for next report in the [Winning on the People Side of Business™](#) series, manufacturing workers say employee health and wellbeing, along with skills development and training, are more important than competitive compensation and benefits for their company to thrive—a trend that's only accelerating as younger workers and underrepresented groups enter the field. They're looking for flexibility, purpose, and tech-forward environments. If manufacturers fail to adapt to these new expectations, they risk losing top talent to industries that already have.

This is a business imperative. The ability to attract and retain the right people will help determine which manufacturers thrive in the years ahead.

# Winning the War for Talent: Rebrand, Reimagine, Reinvent

Forward-thinking manufacturers are uniquely positioned to deliver on the expectations of today's workforce, but standing out in a competitive talent market means reimagining how you present your organization and what you offer employees.

Here are four key strategies to help manufacturers attract the next generation of skilled workers:

01

## Redefine the Manufacturing Brand

To win the war for talent, manufacturers need to tell a new story—one that positions the industry as modern, inclusive, and purpose-driven. Highlight opportunities for innovation, sustainability, and community impact, and actively challenge outdated perceptions of manufacturing careers. By showcasing advanced technologies, meaningful work, and positive contributions to society, manufacturers can appeal to a broader and more diverse talent pool.

02

## Understand What Today's Workers Want

Modern manufacturing professionals expect more than a paycheck—they want to join organizations that invest in their growth and development. Companies that offer clear career paths, ongoing learning, and hands-on experience with cutting-edge technologies like AI, automation, and connected systems are far more likely to attract high-potential, high-performing candidates.

03

## Make Organizational Values Tangible

Candidates are increasingly drawn to companies that authentically live their values—especially around sustainability, diversity, and social responsibility. It's not enough to simply talk about these principles; they must be woven into your recruitment process and workplace culture. Making your commitment visible and actionable strengthens your employer brand and attracts talent who share your mission.

04

## Embrace Flexibility in New Ways

Flexibility is now a baseline expectation—even in manufacturing, where much of the work is traditionally hands-on. While not every role can be remote, manufacturers can still get creative. Options like remote monitoring, hybrid roles that blend on-site and off-site responsibilities, flexible shift scheduling, job sharing, and project-based or gig assignments can all help open the doors to new, diverse talent.



# Retaining Talent:

## Invest in People, Reap the Rewards

Attracting talent is only half the equation—retaining skilled employees is just as critical for long-term success in manufacturing. In today's competitive environment, organizations must invest in the ongoing experience, development, and well-being of their workforce.

Here are four key strategies to help manufacturers keep their best people engaged and committed:

### Leverage Connected Worker Technologies

Connected worker platforms are revolutionizing the employee experience by delivering real-time training, digital collaboration, and instant performance feedback directly into daily workflows. These technologies empower employees to learn on the job, solve problems quickly, and feel supported from day one—boosting confidence, engagement, and loyalty across teams.



### Redesign Onboarding and Commit to Continuous Development

A strong start is essential for long-term retention. Streamlining onboarding to reduce time-to-proficiency helps to ensure new hires can contribute quickly and feel like valued members of the team. But retention doesn't stop there—offering ongoing development opportunities such as micro-credentials, on-the-job learning, and transparent career paths demonstrates a true commitment to employee growth and advancement.



### Prioritize Employee Well-being and Experience

Employee well-being and a positive workplace experience are no longer perks—they're essential. This means going beyond the basics to create an environment where employees feel safe, supported, and valued. Providing access to mental health resources, wellness programs, regular check-ins, and ergonomic workspaces shows you genuinely care for your team's mental and physical health. When employees know their well-being matters, they're more likely to stay and thrive.



### Foster a Culture of Recognition and Inclusion

Employees want to feel seen, heard, and appreciated. Regularly recognizing achievements—whether through formal programs or informal shout-outs—reinforces a sense of belonging and motivates continued excellence. Just as important is cultivating an inclusive culture where diverse perspectives are welcomed, and every employee feels empowered to contribute. A workplace that values recognition and inclusion is one where people want to build their careers.



# The Bottom Line: People Are Your Competitive Advantage

The manufacturing workforce is changing—fast. In this new era, the organizations that win will be those that put people at the heart of their strategy—recognizing employees not just as resources, but as the driving force behind innovation, resilience, and growth.

Winning the talent race requires more than simply filling open roles. It means reimagining every stage of the employee journey—from the first impression of your brand to ongoing development and, ultimately, offboarding. It's about embracing new technologies, championing inclusivity, and fostering a culture where employees are empowered, engaged, and inspired to build their futures with you.

Workforce transformation isn't just an HR initiative—it's a business imperative. The manufacturers who act now to invest in their people will be the ones who adapt, grow, and lead the industry forward. The opportunity is here. Put people at the center and unlock the full potential of your organization—today and for the future.











# About People Strategy & Solutions

**BDO's People Strategy & Solutions team helps manufacturing organizations design and implement workforce strategies that drive long-term performance, combining deep industry insight with experience in consulting, digital enablement, and change management.**

PS&S helps align workforce with business goals, improve onboarding and retention, and build leadership capabilities. We work across all levels of the organization to design practical, people-centered solutions that deliver measurable outcomes. With a dedicated Manufacturing practice, BDO understands the operational challenges manufacturers face. We help clients implement connected worker technologies, navigate digital transformation, and build resilient, future-ready teams. Whether you're rethinking onboarding, investing in upskilling, or planning for long-term workforce agility, BDO is ready to support your journey.

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