

ARTICLE

What is a Skilled Trades Worker? And Why You Should Care

By Hank Brancaccio – PMSMCA (Plumbing Mechanical Sheet Metal Contractors' Alliance) Board of Directors

Most people know what a teacher does; what a fireman or policeman does; what a doctor or lawyer does; but does everyone know what a skilled trades person does on the job every day? More importantly, do they know what a rewarding, well-paying career a life in the trades offers?

When you walk through a building like an elementary school, high school, or a hospital, things you take for granted were probably installed, serviced, or handled by a skilled trades person. When you turn on water, plug in a light or phone charger, adjust the temperature on a thermostat, or trust that if there was a fire in the building that life safety systems will protect you; all of these items were installed by a skilled trades person. They include plumbers, electricians, steamfitters, sheet metal workers, sprinkler fitters, or carpenters. These are the men and women in the construction and service trades that make you more comfortable while in a building every day.

Unfortunately not many young people are considering a career in the skilled trades in this day and age. This is a problem that will only continue to grow. Many of the

current workers in these trades are close to the end of their careers, and finding quality young people to replace them has become a challenge. The Manufacturing Institute, an affiliate of the National Association of Manufacturers, reports that currently in the U.S. there are 600,000 skilled jobs, such as those for electricians, roofers, siding installers, landscapers, plumbers, carpenters and masons, going unfilled. By 2020, the study suggests there will be a need for 10 million new skilled workers. The good news is, the growing demand for skilled workers makes now an ideal time to get into the trades.

Part of the reason few young people consider a career in the trades is lack of exposure to them. When I was growing up, I was in a family of plumbers; so helping my dad on plumbing projects was an everyday occurrence. I also had the opportunity to take tech ed classes in junior high school and high school, which exposed me to things like woodworking, metal shop, machine shop and mechanical drawing. Today, many students do not get the same exposure to understand what a skilled trade person does and needs to know. To be successful in the trades today, a candidate should be good at math, think three-dimensionally, have a good work discipline, enjoy working with their hands, and not be afraid to get them dirty.

Another reason today's youth fail to consider going into the trades is ignorance of or misconceptions about what great career opportunities the trades provide. All skilled trades people go through some type of apprenticeship (classroom and on the job training), which is typically five years long. While in school, apprentices are also working during the day and getting paid good wages. When they graduate, they typically have no school debt and have jobs that pay \$60,000 to \$70,000 a year, plus generous benefits (including defined benefit pension plans). I'll say that again: trades apprentices graduate debt-free with starting salaries of \$60,000 to \$70,000 a year. And that's only the beginning. Top workers who are willing to work overtime, run projects, or manage others can make \$80,000 to \$100,000 a year. For those who are interested in earning college credit, some apprenticeship programs provide the opportunity to earn an associate degree simultaneously with the apprenticeship.

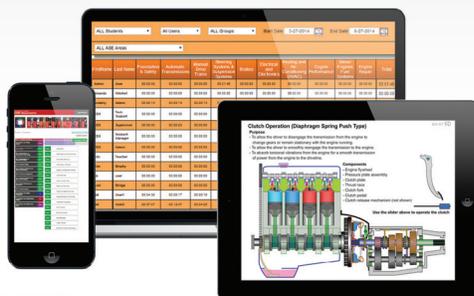
So please encourage your students to consider a career in the skilled trades. To learn more, visit:

www.buildingadvantage.org/ or www.pmsmca.com/

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