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## PRACTICE GROUP: MANUFACTURING

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### ATTRACTING MILLENNIALS TO MANUFACTURING CAREERS

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On the morning of Feb. 23, President Donald Trump met with 24 CEOs from some of our country's largest manufacturers. While job creation remained the overriding theme of the conversation, CEO and Trump MFG Advisory Panel Lead, Andrew Liveris, stated, "We have a supply-side issue today." The number one issue currently facing manufacturers is recruiting and retaining skilled and talented employees.

As the manufacturing practice group leader at Parker, Smith & Feek, I speak with a variety of leaders in manufacturing. Overwhelmingly, finding skilled, talented employees is their number one issue. A key demographic for manufacturers will be millennials, those between the ages of 21 and 36. So what can manufacturers do to attract more millennials?

Tom Mclaughlin, executive director of the Center for Advanced Manufacturing Puget Sound (CAMPS), urged "MFG owners need to understand that millennials want engagement, see life work-balance as important, and will move to a better environment if opportunities are not made available to them in their career pathways." Further, Mclaughlin explained that with the exit of the baby boomers, millennials are estimated to make up 75 percent of the workforce by 2030, and he said millennials can take advanced manufacturing to new levels.

Kristi Duvall of The Boxmaker, a leading packaging design, printing, and manufacturing organization in Kent, Washington, doesn't point to extensive training with millennials for her success, but to her ability to offer engagement. However, she also mentions the difficulty attracting millennials into the organization. She stated The Boxmaker's success in finding the right individuals has come from both being selective and making sure it is a good fit for the individual and the organization.

“ [millennials] want something more important than just a job ”

A relatively new manufacturer, UniEnergy Technologies in Mukilteo, Washington, provides megawatt-scale energy storage solutions. Russ Weed highlighted the work the company does in renewable energy as a driver in its ability to attract millennials. He explained that millennials "want something more important than just a job" and consider their societal needs met by working at UniEnergy. This translates to UniEnergy employees who are engaged with its products at a high level, Weed said.

I also spoke with Dave Osenga of EZ Loader, a Spokane, Washington-based boat trailer manufacturer. Osenga

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said EZ Loader is finding ways to train and develop future leaders as most in senior management are baby boomers. Making sure that everyone is on the same page and that the needs of individuals and the organization are in sync is crucial to success, he said. Available opportunities for millennials at EZ Loader look strong as the organization attempts to automate a largely manual process, he said.



As one of the largest locally owned beverage wholesalers in the Pacific Northwest, Chip Weatherbee and Shawn Bai of Olympic Eagle in Puyallup, Washington, hire a number of millennials. Bai explained that the adult beverage industry is a lifestyle business and attracts employees who are passionate about beer.

Weatherbee said while entry level roles have the most turnover, those who demonstrate the characteristics necessary for success find great opportunities. As a result, Olympic Eagle enjoys excellent tenure and most of its leadership is generation X and baby boomers, he said.

Nathan Davis of Romac said being a U.S.-based family-owned manufacturing business helps attract millennials who are a cultural fit. "All generations can identify with (our products)– they bring clean water, sanitation, and comfort to people," he told me.

Romac, based in Bothell, Washington, has a history of workplace development innovation, and the owners go out of their way to show personal appreciation for employees. Davis explained, "We work hard to create a quality product but give appreciation to everyone involved in our success while having fun." Engagement at all organizational a level, including millennials, is key to Romac employee retention, he said.

The impending retirement of baby boomers coupled with demand for STEM (science, technology, engineering, math) skills demonstrate the importance of millennials to local manufacturers' success. Engagement with associations like CAMPS (I love its M2M Program–Military to Manufacturing, which takes advantage of our region's proximity to Joint Base Lewis McChord and our local naval bases) and local institutions of higher learning is needed to develop training and placement of highly qualified future employees.

State and local government need to work with manufacturers and distributors to keep jobs in Washington and help employers retool both aging equipment and workforce. Manufacturers need to consider how they market to millennials in an increasingly competitive environment for talented employees.