

THERE IS NO SKILLS GAP: SKILLED WORKERS HAVE FLED TO LUCRATIVE PASTURES BECAUSE MANUFACTURES DON'T PAY ENOUGH



The definition of a skilled worker has changed wholly. Today's skilled factory worker is a combination of the conventional machinist and a computer programmer. The days, when to-be workers, learnt their trade by using cutting tools to shape metal pieces are long gone. Today students learn to write the computer code for the work that is required and then feed it into a machine, which tells it how to do it. The machine then goes on to do the job speedier and better. But the machine will make many workers redundant as it will do the work of 10 workers and in some cases even 100 workers. It is assumed that nearly six million factory jobs, that's nearly 33 percent of all manufacturing jobs, have disappeared owing to automation, and job's going overseas to low-wage countries, over the last twelve years. These jobs are gone for good and that's not good for the industry or the economy. But economist believe that a new generation of American workers need to be trained to do highly skilled manufacturing jobs, by learning how to operate the computers that run the machine. The reasoning behind this is that advanced manufacturing is not as easy as the conventional way of manufacturing and is much more intricate. Operating these machines, is not just switching on a lever or pressing a button; it requires fundamental knowledge of metallurgy, physics, chemistry, pneumatics, electrical wiring and computer code. Not only must the worker know how to operate the machine, he should also have basic knowledge what to do when it stops working. If this type of technical expertise is acquired by the worker, it is more than likely that he will land a high-paying job and keep it for as long as he wants. Hundreds of thousands of US factories are desperately in need of skilled workers and are unable to fill vacancies owing to their dearth. The National Association of Manufacturers says that there are approximately 600,000 jobs on hand for anybody who has the requisite advanced skills. Eric Isbister, the C.E.O. of GenMet, a metal-fabricating manufacturer's experience with seeking skilled workers sheds further light on the seriousness of the issue. He said that he desperately needed skilled workers and in response to his advertisements received 1,051 applications of which only 25 met the bill. He employed all of them, but soon found that only 10 of them had the skills to do justice to their jobs and he had to fire 15 of them. However, the real reason why he was unable to find the workers was because most are unwilling to work for the price that is offered. The shortage is self-created. The truth is that what is being touted as a skills gap has nothing to do with skills. The truth is that they are just not paid enough and there won't be many takers for doing jobs at \$10 an hour. If there was a shortage of skilled labor, than those that were available should be able to command very high salaries, but that has just not happened. Its basic economics and the theory of supply and demand wages should be pushed up. The truth is that skilled workers have chosen to go and do other jobs that pay more and the newer generation is not even undergoing training for jobs that don't pay enough, which means that the gap is going to widen even further. In a recent study, the Boston Consulting Group noted "Trying to hire high-skilled workers at rock-bottom rates is not a skills gap." Hal Sirkin, the lead author of the study says that the average age of the skilled workers in the country is 56 and they'll be retiring soon. The void that they'll leave will be extremely hard to fill. Sirkin fears that the fake skills gap, caused by workers deserting the industry owing to insufficient pay, will create a real skills gap, because a new generation of workers is just not being readied. The so-called skills gap is really a gap in education and that education will remedy the problem, irrespective of whether it is phony or real.