**Listening Session – Trades, Manufacturing and Workforce Development**

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**Northwest Technical College**

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**TOPIC:** Employers in building trades seek prospects with strong “soft skills”

* We look for people with a good work ethic, which is hard to train for. (Jamie Quello, Jamie Quello, Peterson Sheet Metal)
* Students who work for a firm while attending NTC don’t necessarily made good permanent employees because they lack communication ability and work ethic. (Brian Kuhrke, Todavich Electric)
* Many NTC graduates and other new employees demonstrate a lack of awareness of what the job required. They want to communicate via phone and use a computer, “but don’t know how to show up at 8 o’clock.” (Brian Kurhke, Todavich Electric)
* We recognize that NTC has the same challenge – “I don’t know how you fix that.” (Sam Mason, manager, Beltrami Electric)
* “They need to be able to stay on task all day not find 100 reasons why they need to leave.” (Sam Mason, Beltrami Electric)
* New employees have difficulty following directions. They expect that they “get a vote, not just input.” They need to understand that they are welcome to share ideas – “but don’t necessarily expect them all to be implemented. … You have fewer good people who are willing to learn. Maybe that it’s everybody needs to be an individual.” (Sam Mason, Beltrami Electric)
* Lack of regimentation and structure in college sets poor example for workplace. Would prefer if students had more or less a full day of classes. What happens is that they have a class that starts at 10, “and they’ve gotten slack.” (Brian Kurhke, Todavich Electric)
* Believe it would be best to hire people while they’re still in high school “so we can teach them how to work and what’s expected. … It’s expensive when you do that.” (Brian Kurhke, Todavich Electric)
* “It’s not the school’s responsibility to teach soft skills. … It’s important for us as managers to help people outside of college. It’s a learned behavior.” (Trisha Newland, Trisha Newland, Knife River Materials Materials)
* Quality of NTC graduates is more uneven than it once was – “Your top students are just incredible, but your worst students are horrible.” (Sam Mason, Beltrami Electric)

**TOPIC:** Strong core skills in a trade area are more important and valuable than more specialized knowledge

* “I need for them to know how to hook up a three-way (switch? outlet?) before they install a solar system.” (Brian Kurhke, Todavich Electric)

**TOPIC:** Specific skill areas needed and/or hired

* Diesel automotive mechanics are needed by construction companies in the area. It’s not hard to fill office positions. Seventy percent of hires are employee referrals, but not the case with diesel mechanics. (Trisha Newland, Knife River Materials)
* Shortage of candidates for CDL-required jobs (commercial driver’s license). (Trisha Newland, Knife River Materials, and Tim Qualley, business services specialist, Minnesota Department of Employment & Economic Development (DEED), Bemidji)
* Successful hiring BSU grads for project management. (Trisha Newland, Knife River Materials)
* Need for nursing graduates. Hospitals have openings they can’t fill – and even harder for nursing homes because they can’t pay as much – “They’re scrambling to get anybody.” (Tim Qualley, DEED)
* There’s a need for more tradespeople – carpenters, that kind of stuff. “Any of the building trades are really scraping for people. A lot of baby boomers are starting to retire, and they’re not getting people for those jobs.” (Tim Qualley, DEED)
* Also demand for higher-tech jobs that require basic computer skills but can train for higher-level skills. (Tim Qualley, DEED)
* When NTC had a carpentry program, graduates knew carpentry was what they wanted to do. Now start with 24 new employees “and end up with six.” (Mike Carom, carpenters union, Bemidji)
* In carpentry union’s apprenticeship program, which runs for 2-3 years, there is a code of ethics class that covers such things as how to dress for a job site, proper language – “even down to body odors that offend people next to you.” (Mike Carom, carpenters union)
* Students have more interest when there’s a value-added outcome such as a specific certification card – “like an OSHA card.” (Mike Carom, carpenters union)
* Augmented reality/virtual reality not yet big in the Bemidji region. (Howie Zetah, Zetah Construction Co., Bemidji)
* A son is in the NTC electrical construction program and doing well – “He said it’s pretty good. For him, that’s saying you’re great.” The son is married with child and has already worked in construction for three years. “He appreciates the opportunity of getting an electrician’s license to move him out of being that guy in the trench with a shovel.” (Sam Mason, Beltrami Electric)

**TOPIC:** Students would benefit from having a more realistic idea of job market before they graduate

* Recommend a course that prepares them for reality of job market, regional wage levels – “A lot of the kids coming out of college expect seventy grand to start. That’s more like Minneapolis wages … . We hire about 150 people a year, and every one who sits across the desk from me always has an expectation that’s not realistic.” (Trisha Newland, Knife River Materials)
* Also could use better interviewing skills and understanding of what’s needed to find jobs and apply. (Trisha Newland, Knife River Materials)
* Need to highlight for students that quality of life and more affordable housing are advantages of living in the Bemidji area. (Howie Zetah)

**TOPIC:** Ideas for improving quality of graduates and preparedness to be successful employees

* “Can we look at better recruitment (by NTC), reaching out to the high schools and getting kids into the industry and see if we can get them excited. … We’ve got to be realistic about pay. … To find those kids is hard, but I think if NTC is really digging deep and sending people out to talk to kids – not just about carpentry but about all of the programs … . You’ve got to get the kids in here.” (Howie Zetah)
* “A lot of the kids who get into carpentry are going to turn into project managers and start their own businesses. You never know where it’s going to take you.” (Howie Zetah)
* “As a faculty person, I could get into the classroom, and maybe I’d be there for a whole day talking about all the programs the college offers. A recruiter can’t get into the classroom.” (Paul Nelson, NTC faculty, high-performance engine machining)
* If we could get into shop classes once or twice a year and explain that trades are a good thing – “you can earn a good living.” (Brian Kurhke, Todavich Electric)
* Consider asking recent grads who have a few years of success in the field to participate in recruitment. (Sam Mason, Beltrami Electric)
* Invite employers to meet with students on the last day of class “rather than getting lost in a big job fair.” (Trisha Newland, Knife River Materials)
* CTC in Staples does mock interviews for students – “they’ve had a lot of success with that.” (Trisha Newland, Knife River Materials)
* Provide information about faculty directly to businesses so they can make a direct connection with them. (Trisha Newland, Knife River Materials)
* Would be beneficial to offer course in family budgeting and bookkeeping – “I make X dollars; that gives me X dollars a month.” (Sam Mason, Beltrami Electric)
* In seasonal trade fields, graduates need to understand that they might not be employed full-time year-round. (Jamie Quello, Peterson Sheet Metal)
* Important for NTC to have representatives, including with the NTC Foundation, who are out in the community and can make connections with business people. (Howie Zetah)