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Can We Capture The Rising Tide of Apprenticeship?

Most of us have heard the adage that “a rising tide lifts all boats.” I knew that quote is most often attributed to John F. Kennedy, but I didn’t realize that, in part, he was referring to the building of the St. Lawrence Seaway and its place in history as a national asset. As I grew up on the St. Lawrence River, and I know firsthand the economic strength and stability the Seaway has provided to my hometown community of Massena, NY – it was an added surprise.

In September of 1960, Kennedy used the phrase as part of his remarks on behalf of the governor of Ohio. He spoke of developing natural resources, such as the Seaway, because he felt that the economic benefits of investing in something like the Seaway had the potential to benefit more than just the community where it was located; every town and city that lied along the Seaway from the Gulf of St. Lawrence to the Great Lakes would benefit. Hence the quote – *a rising tide lifts all boats*. Although it was a ship he referenced, he was talking about the economic benefits of working together to build something that benefits many.

I look at the apprenticeship initiative as one of those rising tides that can “lift” manufacturers and the communities in which they reside.

Over 150,000 employers in more than 1,000 occupations currently utilize industry-driven on-the-job training, more commonly referred to as apprenticeship. It has literally trained millions of apprentices for over 75 years. Apprenticeship programs have helped to develop what has always been deemed a world-class manufacturing workforce here in the United States. The onset of the “silver tsunami” of retirements from the skilled trades is attempting to throttle our country’s economic competitiveness. Talent shortages

and an expanding skill gap hinders manufacturers’ efforts to expand and innovate. More than ever, we need to provide alternative pathways which lead to stable careers and highly skilled workers.

Creating high quality apprenticeship programs facilitates employers to meet their immediate workforce needs and also helps cultivate the next generation of workers; all of whom will be better prepared and capable of tackling manufacturing’s new and emerging technologies.

So how does this raise all boats? As more companies in NY begin to participate in apprenticeship, we begin to see that advanced training and up-skilling are common day terms. It seems like everyone is doing it. And if they are not, people wonder why not. Employees are becoming more aware of company investment in them and we see company loyalty on the rise. As companies expand and grow, they have well trained employees who are up to the challenge; ready and eager to grow with the new technologies.

As more companies participate, we are able to provide more local and targeted training opportunities and respond to company needs – even the very small manufacturers. Apprentices and the companies they work for have opportunity to share challenges and successes to continue improving processes. More opportunities to network occur.

As we grow apprenticeship, our companies grow with us, our apprentices grow with us, and we see that the rising tide of this “earn to learn training” model will help us all. If you’d like to learn more about MACNY’s apprenticeship program, email me at mponge@macny.org.