

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

You are listening to Work in Progress. I'm Ramona Schindelheim. Editor-in-Chief of WorkingNation. Work in Progress explores the rapidly changing workplace through conversations with innovators, educators, and decision-makers, people with solutions to today's workforce challenges.

Gardner Carrick, The Manufacturing Institute:

We wish to attract everyone to manufacturing. Our military veterans, they are highly sought after by manufacturing. They are taught to a highest standard when you are in the United States military. When those men and women complete their military service, we sincerely hope that they will look at manufacturing as a career, and we at The Manufacturing Institute have made large investments to try to support them in their transition and to encourage them to look at manufacturing as a career.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

Gardner Carrick is Chief Program Officer at The Manufacturing Institute. He's one of the people I spoke with for Working Nation's three-part series on manufacturing. In this episode, we'll look at how companies can and should attract a more diverse workforce, including transitioning military personnel, veterans and women. The Manufacturing Institute says that a surge in manufacturing, partly due to the infusion of federal money through the CHIPS and Science Act and the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, will have companies scrambling to fill positions in coming years. A recent report projects that the industry will soon need nearly 4 million new workers, many with digital skills. Whether they have specific digital skills or not, many people with military backgrounds have aptitudes that would be a good fit for new careers in manufacturing. Again, Gardner Carrick.

Gardner Carrick, The Manufacturing Institute:

Many of them come with skills that they don't even realize are relevant to manufacturing. Almost everyone in the military needs to operate really safely around really dangerous equipment and maintain that equipment to a quality standard that their life depends on. Those are skills that are highly in demand in manufacturing.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

One way to help military professionals with an easier transition to jobs in manufacturing is through Heroes MAKE America. It was launched by The Manufacturing Institute to help transitioning service members, veterans, National Guard members, reservists and even military spouses prepare for careers in manufacturing. Heroes MAKE America works with companies of all sizes on recruiting and training. It also works directly with the US Department of Defense's SkillBridge program, which places current military service members into the civilian workplace in their last six months of active duty.

Amy Thomas, Heroes MAKE America:

We run the SkillBridge training programs for those that are transitioning out of the military. We have military to manufacturing events to directly connect them to manufacturers that are hiring. Then we also provide resources and tools for manufacturers to better welcome the military talent into their plans.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

Amy Thomas is National Director of the Military and Veterans Initiative, Heroes MAKE America. About 200,000 military personnel transition out of the service every year. Most need to find civilian jobs, but many don't know where to even begin. Programs like the government's SkillBridge can give them a sense of a particular type of job and can often lead to getting hired, but not everyone in the service gets that opportunity. Thomas says that a lot of transitioning service members are unaware of the many rewarding careers awaiting them, careers in which they can put their valued military skills to work. Through Heroes MAKE America, transitioning military can learn about manufacturing operations, industrial systems, maintenance and logistics, in person and virtually across the country. Thomas explains how it works.

Amy Thomas, Heroes MAKE America:

If they come into one of our training programs and they work with one of our program managers on the ground, they'll go through their industry-recognized certification training that is delivered on behalf of... Local technical or community colleges teach that part for us. And then our program managers work with them on career readiness support and their military skills translation. So our career and readiness support would be resume prep, interview prep, LinkedIn, maybe a financial readiness course, but then when we talk to them to try and help them translate their military skills and experience, we find out what they did in the military and then how we can relate it to manufacturing careers.

So for example, if you were infantry in the military, and a lot of times they'll tell me, "Oh, I carried a backpack full of bullets and I walked a lot." But what they also go on to say is that, "We have to have safety communication, logistics, have to make critical thinking under pressure," those types of things. When we tell them that those directly correlate with careers in the industry, it's almost like a light bulb goes off and they're like, "Oh, I didn't think about it that way." So then they end up finding these fantastic careers.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

The Manufacturing Institute also takes military personnel and veterans right into the plants to see how products are being made. They also host in-person and virtual career fairs as well as Heroes Connect events, which Thomas calls a sixty-minute infomercial in which manufacturers can talk about their company and career options. Thomas says, the institute and manufacturing companies also try to change the perception of the industry.

Amy Thomas, Heroes MAKE America:

It's not the same manufacturing from even 10 years ago where we see all these things as dark, dirty, dangerous, low-paying. We go into these plants or factories and we see high-tech, high-paying thrilling jobs, like 3-D printers, automation, climate control these days. So we really try to paint the picture of what these careers look like, what the advancement pathways are, and how their skills directly translate into these careers.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

If a transitioning military member or veteran sees opportunity and has interest in the industry, Heroes MAKE America helps them identify how the skills they developed in the service can translate to manufacturing jobs.

Amy Thomas, Heroes MAKE America:

Most of them have four, eight years, 10 years plus in the military working on aircraft or working in high-profile jobs around high-profile equipment, responsible for these millions of dollars in equipment. I think it's just helping them see that they do qualify for these jobs. They just don't know where they are, they don't have a great plan, and they don't know how the skills translate. Once they get into the plants, talk and learn from the manufacturers that we have at these events, it's really like, "Wow, I didn't know that." So what we're seeing, our program has a really high success rate. So we've got anywhere between a 92 and 93% placement rate. Seven to 10 weeks prior to them coming into one of our training programs, they might not have even know these jobs existed, and now they have a great plan, a great career, and they're going off to do great things in the manufacturing industry.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

And that outreach and education extends to military spouses as well.

Amy Thomas, Heroes MAKE America:

I, myself, am a military spouse. It was hard for me when we moved around to find employment because they were like, "Oh, well, your spouse is going to be gone. We're not going to touch it because you're not going to be here long enough." But many military spouses are college-educated, high-skill level. I mean, I don't think you can find a better logistician in the world than a military spouse. I mean, that spouse has to keep everything running at home, take care of the kids, do the job and everything when their spouse is deployed.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

James Goppert served in the U.S Army for the first part of his career, 25 years, 10 months, 21 days to be exact. He traveled to seven different countries as a personnel service specialist, which is the military's version of human resources. Now, he's an HR business partner at a packaging company, Smurfit Westrock based in North Carolina. Goppert says he had a pretty seamless transition to a civilian job, given what he did in the service. Now he advocates for Heroes MAKE America to help other transitioning military members learn what their futures could be. And at recruiting events, he seeks out active-duty military and mentors them.

James Goppert, Smurfit Westrock:

So now how do I get the idea of fear out of the transitioning service members? And so that's whenever I started advocating Heroes MAKE America. So I would go to recruiting events at military posts because even if it weren't necessarily for us, I was like, "Hey, check out Heroes MAKE America. Check out this. They'll help give you stuff that you could use on the outsides, mechatronics, mechanicals, electric." So I started advocating for that. A lot of times, they would have a booth over there and I'd be like, "All right, they're over there. Go talk to them." It became this working relationship to now it's like, they're family.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

Goppert says he shares his personal experiences to let transitioning service members know what's available to them, and that sometimes it just requires tweaking the resume to get in the door.

James Goppert, Smurfit Westrock:

I'm going to call you on this date. We'll set up a time. I go through reading the resume, give my suggestions, give them a phone call and tell them why. What's going to stand out? What's going to sit

there? How does that translate? What skills? A lot of military mindset gets into what job they did. "Oh, well, I drove trucks," or "ADA mike in the Army, truck driver." "Okay, but what other skills do you have?" You put your uniform together, that's attention to detail. Quality. Think about all of those little things that you've done and those skills relate to something on the civilian side. It's just you have to find those individual skills and say, "What have I done as a soldier that I can translate and say, 'I've done this'?" Yes, you drove a truck. That's great, but you've done more.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

And even if Goppert's Company isn't right for a transitioning veteran, he'll help them find a company that is right.

James Goppert, Smurfit Westrock:

First and foremost, it's Smurfit Westrock, hey, we're looking for individuals. We need people. But if there's something that they're looking for that it doesn't fit, for whatever reason it doesn't fit for us, then I'll say, "Well, we do have a SkillBridge. Our SkillBridge is 90 days. It helps develop. It gives you a plethora of different things. We have early careers and development programs." So I'll go over the different specialty programs. But even if that's still not fit, what they need, then I'm like, "All right, what do you want to do?" Because I'll take care of people. I want to make sure that everybody has that opportunity and is very passionate. So I'll look. Before a recruiting event or something like that, I'll go to the tables and see what everybody does. I'll see who's truly invested in it.

Literally, I will say, "All right, cool. You love driving trucks or you love doing this. You love logistics. All right, let me show you this one that's a hundred percent veterans. They will take care of you." Or "Hey, let me introduce you to Fain, Manufacturing Institute, Heroes MAKE America, those things like that and show them. If they're not there, then I'm like, "All right, here's my email address. Here's my personal cell phone number. Call me and let's figure out what you need to do." Does it add more to my plate? It does, but at the end of the day, somebody has an opportunity whether it's with Smurfit Westrock, whether it's with Manufacturing Institute or whoever that needs somebody because the jobs, as they've discussed, they're there, but not everybody knows those jobs are there. Their skills? They don't know that they have the skills to actually do them.

Tina Caldwell, Acutec Precision Aerospace:

When I did my internship in a local manufacturing facility, there were not very many women in that facility.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

Tina Caldwell is a human resources generalist at Acutec Precision Aerospace, which is run by a woman. Through the Women MAKE America Initiative, manufacturers are actively recruiting more women into the industry, tapping into the potential of this underrepresented group. The attempt to close the gender gap is showing some progress.

Tina Caldwell, Acutec Precision Aerospace:

Fast forward 25 years and we're going to find a lot more women in that facility. They are machinists. They're doing inspection. They're doing front office jobs. They're doing non-destructive testing. They're doing the shipping. They're helping with the continuous improvement. They are throughout the

organization and I think that whether male or female, there are good paying, great opportunities in manufacturing, if you want to pursue that.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

Courtney Silver is president of Ketchie, a precision machine shop in Concord, North Carolina. We met her in episode two, when she shared the challenges of hiring for small manufacturing companies. Ketchie is a seventy-seven-year-old, family-owned business, which she has run for the past 16 years.

Courtney Silver, Ketchie:

I would say I'm still an outlier based on the industry events, trade shows I've been to. It's still very clear, I'm a pretty big minority.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

Silver was a winner of the Women MAKE America Award presented by The Manufacturing Institute to women who have made a profound difference in reducing the gender gap in manufacturing. More than 1000 women have received the honor so far. Silver says that while manufacturing was built around men, more and more women are seeing opportunity in the industry, but it takes convincing that it's not necessarily the kind of work their fathers or grandfathers did.

Courtney Silver, Ketchie:

Years ago, we didn't have the machining technology that we had. It was very hard and strenuous and a lot of it was dirty and you were covered in all sorts of things. I think as the result of how our industries changed, we have cranes. They're clean working environments, organized. There's a lot that's happening in manufacturing that we don't need to manually do with our hands. Now we still do, obviously, but with robotics, with automation. So that opens it up for more women, and I think that's what's exciting about it.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

The National Association of Manufacturers estimates that women account for nearly 30% of the manufacturing workforce now. In addition to Women MAKE America, they have a new campaign called 35 x 30, to boost the percentage to 35% of the workforce by 2030. To do this, the 35 x 30 campaign is creating a nationwide movement with more than 1000 female mentors connecting to emerging female leaders and students. They're working to broaden the pipeline of employees by supporting women throughout their education. Again, Gardner Carrick and James Goppert.

Gardner Carrick, The Manufacturing Institute:

We think that there are tremendous opportunities for people of all backgrounds in manufacturing. The limiting factors, previously, tended to be physical, which really did in many ways restrict women's ability to be successful in environment where you were lifting heavy, heavy things hour after hour, day after day. That's no longer the case, in most manufacturing. You have the machines that are doing that work. So the barriers to entry for women are not as great as they were previous. So we believe that those women that are looking for careers that allow them to work with technology, that allow them to make incredible products, that manufacturing more than ever offers them opportunities to do. So for our military veterans, they are highly sought after.

James Goppert, Smurfit Westrock:

A veteran with time and service, we'll say anywhere from 10 to 20 years, you're going to end up with an individual that has leadership skillset. They've been in long enough to either see great leaders and been a great leader, seen bad leaders and be a great leader because they know not to be a bad leader, so they have leadership skills. They know how to talk with somebody. They know how to motivate people, get them to do what they needed done. Then your junior soldiers, your junior military members, the one to six year timeframe, they've been in long enough. They've been taught the skills of safety, quality, attention to detail, just the minor things that a lot of employers look for. Then on top of that, they follow orders. They understand. They also have the ingenuity to think outside of the box.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

You've been listening to the final episode of a three-part series on the boom in manufacturing and how employers are working to fill thousands of jobs across the country. I'm Ramona, Editor-in-Chief of WorkingNation. Thanks for listening.