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## Help Wanted For High-Skills Jobs

**UNEMPLOYMENT REMAINS HIGH, YET SKILLED MANUFACTURING JOBS ARE BEING LEFT UNFILLED**

by *Eliza Krigman*

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Ace Clearwater Enterprises, a California company that supplies parts to the aerospace and power generation industries, interviewed 200 people for jobs last year and hired 70 of them -- but only 39 remain.

They just didn't have the skills necessary to do the job, said Ace president **Kellie Johnson**, who noted that the company still has positions it can't fill. Even amidst a recession, advanced manufacturing is a growing sector of the U.S. economy. But, despite the nation's 10 percent unemployment rate, Johnson isn't the only employer struggling to find good workers.

An insufficient talent pool holds back company growth, said **Drew Greenblatt**, president of [Marlin Steel Wire](#). Marlin makes [customized steel baskets](#) and other products for a host of clients ranging from the automotive to retail industry. The factory is extra busy at the moment making parts that will be used in a water filtration system in Haiti.

Some of [Marlin's machines](#) cost a quarter of a million dollars and require someone with both technical skills and intellectual horsepower to operate them. **Odama Toe**, a recent hire, operates one of the more expensive machines, which means he's responsible for writing the software that tells the machine what kind of part to produce. Guys like Odama are hard to find, Greenblatt said.

Spectrum Lighting, a Massachusetts company that manufactures energy-efficient lighting fixtures, created 10 jobs in 2009 but is struggling to find the right people. "Years ago it was simpler," president **Jeffrey Fein** said, remembering the days when lighting fixtures required just two wires and relatively little expertise. The lighting technology of today -- LEDs, high-intensity discharge lamps, emergency backups -- require more sophisticated engineering, and finding workers with the appropriate skills has proven difficult.

"We are constantly putting up ads, we have a human resource person who is always looking, we do Craigslist and we work with employment agencies," said Fein, who is frustrated that local educators aren't doing more to produce graduates with the skills he needs.

With high unemployment nationwide, advanced manufacturing's labor conundrum has put a spotlight on the disconnect between education and career pathways. The lack of coordination could result in an "outsourcing tsunami," according to **Julian Alssid**, executive director of the Workforce Strategy Center. If employers can't meet their labor needs domestically, they will have

to look overseas -- a problem that is only exacerbated by the large chunk of the workforce that is about to retire.

Part of the challenge is a lack of knowledge about what kinds of jobs are available. According to the National Association of Manufacturers, 12 million Americans work directly in manufacturing, roughly 10 percent of the workforce. Industry insiders complain that mainstream media coverage has written an obituary for American manufacturing when it's not dead.

Stimulus money included more than \$4 billion for initiatives related to workforce training, but none of the employers interviewed for this story had seen it make a dent in the problem.

**David Baime**, senior vice president at the American Association of Community Colleges, has worked to urge community colleges to go after the federal money, and although he can't quantify it at this time, he said there has been a large impact. He cites Pima Community College in Tucson, Ariz., as an example of a school that has received stimulus money for training.

Community colleges by nature are more responsive to local industry needs. Johnson has partnered with community colleges in her area and calls on other employers to do the same. Enhanced Workforce Investment Boards are also needed, added Johnson, who served as vice chair of the Manufacturing Council at the Department of Commerce.

All parties agree that the labor shortage is a serious problem and policymakers should address this with strategic, long-term vision. "We need all hands on deck," Alssid said. "We can't treat workforce development like a sidebar."

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