Written by Susan Wasley, BE&K Director of Special Programs
Thursday, 01 May 2008 00:00

Susan Wasley, BE&K Director of Special Programs

Where on earth will you find enough skilled labor to keep your plant running or finish your next job? Perhaps you should start looking in your own backyard.

Available labor in the maintenance and reliability arena appears to have hit a critical low— and the situation seems to be growing grimmer by the day! Yet, the pool of 80 million women in the American work force has barely been tapped to help fill the void. These days, industry experts tell us, fewer than 20,000 women actually are “in the trenches turning wrenches.” What’s really the problem here?

Could it be that women don’t want to work in traditionally male-dominated trades? Research tells us that they want the same thing men do from their jobs—good pay, fair treatment, a chance for growth and an opportunity for a better life. The fact is, very few young women are encouraged to explore careers in the skilled trades. High school educators and career tech advisors wrongly assume that “girls” aren’t interested in “those types of jobs.” But, when young women learn the facts about crafts training, especially about the earning potential, they are very interested, indeed. Thus, we need to make sure teachers and advisers have the facts and keep an open mind about nontraditional employment options. Could it be a matter of women not being able to do the work? Archeological research on prehistoric humans indicates that males and females participated equally in chores of daily living, including the construction and maintenance of the family’s shelter. As recently as World War II, women proved they could succeed in all types non-traditional roles, performing every kind of job America had to offer while the men went to battle. It worked then because everyone agreed that in order to win the war, jobs had to get done. Americans successfully united to march to the beat of a patriotic drum. Women were recruited, hired, trained and compensated well for doing what was traditionally referred to as men’s work. They were proud of their work and men were proud of them!

Or, could the problem be that men simply don’t care to have women in the skilled trades? What

the vast majority of men working in these areas really care about are safety, quality and doing a job right the first time, every time. That's what the vast majority of women care about as well. When given the right training, mentoring and opportunity, they, like men, work safely and produce consistently high-quality work. Proper training allows everyone—regardless of gender—to focus on what all people on the job should be focused on: the work!

Today, our nation faces a different kind of threat than that posed by World War II—an economic one. If we don't tap into a new and robust labor pool, many of our industries and much of our infrastructure will suffer and our economy will continue its downward spiral. The solution lives and breathes in homes across America, but we must stop pointing fingers at one another and unite just as we did more than 60 years ago. Solving the problem lies in the building of partnerships among industry, education, government and communities—and in tapping under-utilized labor pools.

If your operations are desperately seeking skilled labor, prepare for the problem to get worse. It will! Take action now. Recruiting and training women is a short-term, yet powerful solution with lasting benefits. The skilled trades need good people and women need good-paying jobs. Let's begin looking in our own backyards for a way to end this labor crisis. **MT**

Joomla SEO powered by JoomSEF