

Kelley's Corner

I Wanna Be a Waiter - or - Why Are There No Trades People?

I hear the same lament from every company that needs tradespersons in their organization. "I cannot hire enough people and those I have are not sufficiently skilled". The drought is particularly bad in the mechanical repair trades. Why?

Opinions abound regarding the root cause(s), but I would like to offer my own view from my experiences I feel that is caused by - "Our culture and thereby, our education system:.

Throughout our North American society, the common credo is "Get and Education". What this really means is "Go to University". In social circles a person who scraped through a backwater college and attained a fine arts degree is more respected than a certified technician who specializes in complex mobile electronics repairs. As well, if a student is underachieving in high school he/she is directed toward the trades. The difference in the real world is whether or not the technician is going to leave the fine arts graduate a small or a large tip in the restaurant.

The Europeans do a much better job guiding their student's career paths. Students are approached in grade schools and given the opportunity to see lifestyles and choices which will greet them later in life. With the exception of titled gentry, they hold a higher regard towards skilled tradespersons. They do however, often make the same mistake of streaming the lower academic achievers to the vocational side.

The B.C. government has exasperated the problem twice in the last decade by changing the way that trade apprenticeships are handled. Their goal was to try to make the industry more proactive and reduce government expenses. The effect has been to create confusion, offload expenses to an industry already burdened with regulation and to reduce service levels.

Our Canadian government(s) is also part of the problem. The interprovincial qualification standards have only recently become recognized by a majority of the Provinces with the red seal program. As well, the employment insurance replacement wages received when the apprentices attend school can be less than welfare and often arrive so late that the apprentice does not receive any compensation prior to returning to work.

So what are the solutions?
Can we change our society? Who is we?

If you want an answer now, the bad news is that I am out of room.
The good news is that there is always next month.

Kelley