

## Are You Thinking Differently About Work?

### The Changing Work Dynamic – *the new mindset of jobseekers*

By Mike Russo – President & CEO, National Institute for Innovation and Technology, October 2021

The Covid pandemic has forced all of us to think about things differently and provided more time to think. It has also illustrated how vulnerable we all are and is forcing us to consider our personal health, finances, and the supply chain and infrastructure we all depend on. This has manifested itself in one area more than most; what we do to make a living.

Unexpected changes, in many cases lead us to consider where we are in life and where we want to be. The fact is that until now, many people looked at employment as being necessary and transactional. For many in the workforce, they were “happy” to have a job and thrilled if it included benefits. Getting ahead or climbing the ladder in the organization was an extra. Many have become accustomed to living paycheck to paycheck, others in the ‘middle’ of the economic pyramid have enjoyed an illusion of security and defined incremental promotions or wage increasers as satisfying. The belief that having a college degree provides a clear path to a real career is no longer a “given”.

After this time of reflection and in some cases disruption in employment, many have, and will continue to evaluate what they do to make a living. Those looking for careers with opportunities for real advancement are stepping back and considering retooling their skills now more than ever.



At the same time, STEM and tech related careers in advanced manufacturing and strategic industry sectors are struggling to find talent. These growth industries, which are important to national security and global competitiveness, provide well-paying jobs and opportunities for career advancement. For those unfamiliar with these industries, just the terminology may make it seem that they are not a fit. The truth is that the gateway to these industries lies at the technician level and within reach of many.

Expectations have changed. People are becoming less satisfied with just knowing they have a job and more interested in having a career. They are seeking flexibility in their daily work lives and career options with pathways to real growth. They are not looking forward to going into debt for years only to find that the job they land doesn’t quite cover their cost of living and paying back student debt. There’s no doubt that university education is valuable and has its place, however targeted, cost-effective training that can be credit bearing and used to pursue degrees that provide advancement in the workplace is more meaningful to the masses of underemployed. In fact, this approach can help with university enrollment over time as well as increase the talent pool in areas that are struggling by pulling more people into the pipeline.

Most of us won’t easily forget the events of the past 18 months or thinking that things will return to “normal”. The ongoing mutation and transmission of the Covid virus, the vulnerability of food and water supplies, the impact of climate change, and the inability of governments to provide leadership, direction, and support at a time when it is most needed due to attacks on the credibility of institutions that we have in the past counted on, all means that our personal choices may well have greater impact than ever before.

The days of counting on “the system” to provide a pathway to success or “following the footsteps” of others to lead to success in life are now greatly diminished. Yes, it’s now a time to “Think Differently”.

*The National Institute for Innovation and Technology’s mission is to identify roadblocks to innovation in strategic industry sectors and ensure they are eliminated. The Institute has a major focus on developing the infrastructure needed to expand the talent pipeline by creating better access to careers and training required to succeed in these industries.*

Contact Mike Russo at mail: [mrusso@niit-usa.org](mailto:mrusso@niit-usa.org)