

SPECIAL FEATURE

# Employment opportunities abound in sector

## Auto industry seeks out the best in business

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### HUMAN CAPITAL

Are you aware that the automotive industry is in great need of people to work in interesting, high tech jobs that pay very well? If you don't work in automotive, you probably didn't know that. (I didn't.)

Do you have children that you hope will go to university and then enter a profession within the business, medical, legal or engineering fields? Have you considered encouraging them to enter one of the skilled trades? If you are like many parents, you haven't.

Let me take you on a journey deeper into these two issues and show you how they can intersect:

#### Issue 1: Automotive

The automotive industry in Ontario is huge. How huge? In 2004, Ontario produced more automobiles than any other jurisdiction in North America! That shocking statistic can be found on the Council for Automotive Human Resources (CAHR) website.

Here are some more facts. The automotive sector employs 150,000 workers in manufacturing and assembly in Ontario and over 330,000 jobs in distribution and aftermarket sales and service. That's almost half a million jobs.

That means that roughly 17 per cent or one in six jobs in Ontario is tied to the automotive sector. In some communities, such as Windsor, Cambridge, Oakville, Oshawa, Bramalea and Alliston, this ratio is even higher. While many of us outside of the industry tend to think only of the "big three" when we think of automotive, at least 80 per cent of automotive-related employees work within small to medium organizations that feed into the industry through their manufacture, support, distribution, sales and

service. These smaller employers are having increasingly more difficulty attracting and retaining employees. Why? Because there are not enough skilled tradespeople graduating from colleges to fill all the positions that will result from the baby boom workforce retiring.

While this challenge is not unique to the automotive industry the situation could ultimately render us, in Ontario, unable to complete in the global automotive market. Our failure to keep the automotive industry strong could be devastating to the Ontario economy.

#### Issue 2: Early Leavers

Students are dropping out of high school at an alarming rate.

According to a 2005 report prepared for the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training, entitled: Early School Leavers, about one in four Ontario students drop out of school before they graduate and a much higher percentage of males drop out than females. There are various reasons, causes, explanations and excuses for this shameful

phenomenon, which is on the rise. But consider this: In addition to the various high risk factors that contribute to leaving school early, are we middle class parents pushing our kids right out of school? Are we pressuring them into university as a matter of principal, even when it may not be a fit? Are we pushing them to get excited about professions in which they have no interest, in order to satisfy our own status needs? I know many young people (all males) that did not match the profiles or risk factors for "early leavers" and yet they dropped out, or came dangerously close to doing so. They came from middle class families, had no drug, discipline or learning problems, and their parents were supportive, strongly encouraging them to achieve (read: attend university).

Perhaps, faced with the prospect of more years of education within a highly structured, theoretical environment, leading to a profession they don't want anyway, some high school students just give up.

Don't get me wrong. University is a fantastic learning experience for many people, but not for everyone. Many young people like to work with their hands, yet in recent years there seems to be a stigma against that type of work.

We think the trades are fine for other people's kids, but not our own. So we push. And heck, if I'm a 16 year old who doesn't agree with my parents' career goals for me, and my choices are university or nothing...well, maybe I'll just take nothing.

#### Linking Students and Automotive

If we presented the facts about working in the skilled trades, our kids could make an informed choice about their careers. They could get excited about staying in high school and attending a community college, knowing that they are working towards a trade they would enjoy.

There is an ever-increasing demand for skilled tradespeople in the automotive

industry, which is arguably the largest industry in Ontario. What are the advantages of skilled trades in automotive?

1. The high demand in automotive spells a greater success rate in getting jobs because there are less applicants.

2. Many of the jobs within automotive are highly automated and use sophisticated equipment and technology.

3. According to CAHR, the three most sought after characteristics in automotive are: (a) a strong work ethic, (b) a willingness to learn and (c) openness to change. These are characteristics that we all have the potential to develop, given the right attitude.

4. There are many types of skilled jobs to choose from within the automotive industry like Tool & Die, Machinist, Industrial Electrician, Industrial Mechanic/Millwright, Industrial Welder, Mould Maker and Pattern Maker.

5. Skilled trade jobs pay very well – some better than those in other professional categories.

6. Working in automotive gives employees access to some of the best employers in North America and helps to make a valuable contribution to the Ontario economy.

Skilled trades in automotive are the kinds of jobs that harmonize with a younger generation's priorities: being valued, working with technology, having fun at work, making a difference and earning good money. If you are a parent or are influential in a young person's life, consider that they may be well suited to working in the skilled trades. It's only fair to give them the facts, offer the possibility and inform them of the advantages.

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