

Searching for Skilled Employees? Serve on an Advisory Committee.

While the State's educational communities strive to provide the best possible workforce education programs and courses to meet the demand for skilled workers, another pressing need continues. That need is for members of the business and industry community to serve on a college or high school Career and Technical Education (CTE) Program Advisory Committee.

Traditionally, an advisory committee provides a format for the sharing of relevant information and ideas. Membership is typically comprised of business and industry community members, from outside of the field of education, whose expertise and experience represent a particular occupational field. Advisory committees can be established for a single workforce education program such as Welding Technology or for all of the CTE programs at a school district. Advisory committees typically meet two to three times per academic year to assist educators in developing, maintaining, and evaluating workforce education programs and courses.

So why do schools need advisory committees? In addition to complying with Federal and State regulations, it just makes good sense to have a venue that can assist educators to better understand the workforce training needs and employment opportunities for their students. Committee members can assist schools in various matters such as reviewing curriculum, evaluating classroom and laboratory facilities, serving as a classroom speaker, arranging for field trips, creating student internship opportunities, assisting with supplemental funding, donating supplies and equipment, etc. One key element to keep in mind is that the role of a committee member is one of advice: not administration. Serving on an advisory committee lets school districts know how important they are to the community.

As the NCCER curriculum modules are being embedded in more CTE courses, the opportunity to hire a high school graduate with more craft-related skills should increase. To strengthen that process and provide input that encourages CTE programs to be designed to meet the area workforce employment needs, colleges and high schools need the advice of local area business and industry professionals to guide them. A premiere way to assist with such advice is by volunteering to serve on an advisory committee.

While attending the *Education Symposium - Trends Affecting Education* that was held in Houston, May 2013, Dr. Brenda Hellyer, Chancellor, San Jacinto College District, was the moderator for *Session 2 – Pathways to Meaningful Careers*. During her presentation she spoke of the strong partnerships the District has with the local ISD's and the importance of partnerships San Jacinto College has with industry. Dr. Hellyer stated, "The most important partnership we have with industry is advice. We depend on industry to guide us on what programs and courses we should have." The advice from industry that she related to typically comes from members of the business and industry community who volunteer and serve on one or more of the numerous Technical Education programs that the college has to offer. For all of our area colleges and high schools, such advice is still relevant in 2020 and required to ensure the educational community offers courses that are directly related to meeting the workforce needs of industry.

I read an article in *The Atlantic* that indicated more than half (53.6%) of America's college graduates under the age of 25 are either unemployed or working in a job that does not require a bachelor's degree. Advisory committee members have the opportunity and an obligation to fill an awareness gap to educators, to students, and ultimately to parents, of the career opportunities that are available to high school graduates that do not require a four year degree, especially when the educational programs offered reflect the needs of local business and industry.

As the start of a new academic year approaches, I encourage you to consider investing time for the future workforce by contacting a local college or high school and volunteering to serve on a CTE Program Advisory Committee. Serving on an advisory committee is an investment, worthy of our time and expertise, which can produce and increase the pipeline of our future craft professionals.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Steven F. Horton, Ed.D., is the Schools Training Division Director for the Construction and Maintenance Education Foundation with a primary focus on creating an employment growth by promoting the Construction Industry as a career choice to students in local high schools. As a former State Board Member for the Texas Association of College Technical Educators, Dean of Technical Education, and department chair/faculty member, Dr. Horton spent nearly 40 years providing supervision, support, and administrative leadership in the development, implementation, and evaluation of technical education programs, courses, and facilities to meet the career and educational goals of students in workforce education.