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PARSABLE

Lawrence Whittle is the CEO of Parsable, provider of the leading connected worker platform built to digitize, execute, measure and transform industrial work at scale. Companies with operations in more than 130 countries rely on Parsable to empower their workers with modern, digital tools and improve productivity, quality and safety across their operations.

HOW TO BRING MUCH-NEEDED TALENT BACK TO THE GLOBAL INDUSTRIAL SECTOR

Companies should focus on meeting the workplace expectations of Generation Z

As the 2020 presidential election looms closer, the manufacturing and industrial sectors are getting more public attention. Candidates like Rep. Tim Ryan proposed the need for a new Cabinet position, the Chief Manufacturing Officer, while the National Association of Manufacturers pledged in July to upskill up to 1.2 million industrial workers to address the skills gap and labor shortage head-on.

Headlines aside, the growing threat of nearly 2.4 million unfilled manufacturing jobs over the next decade is very real, making it clear the climate is ripe for a renewed focus on the industry.

Yet there's another, often overlooked, part of the conversation that is critical to attracting and retaining talent: Modern technology for the industrial worker.

The challenge is not only "How do I attract future workers?" It's also "How do I get fast time-to-competency?" and "How do I do this repeatedly?" The days of relying on tacit knowledge, paper binders and episodic in-person training are disappearing.

When we think of technology as it applies to the industrial world, the general rhetoric is often fraught with concerns over robots and advanced automation taking over jobs. What we hear less of is the inherent value of technology, especially in the process industries, in making daily work much more productive and rewarding — and less tedious — for frontline employees. Many technology advancements, from artificial intelligence to the Internet of Things to collaborative robots, have not resulted in products and systems that are removing the need for human workers. In fact, it's quite the opposite. Many of these advancements have resulted in products and processes that will attract and keep much-needed and relied-upon talent.

But what if that talent isn't there?

Tech's role in the war for talent

Modern technology can provide the draw that will attract top talent back to manufacturing — frankly, all the process industries — and it's crucial the industry place more emphasis on tech's direct role in the war for talent.

We're in the middle of one of the lowest unemployment rates the U.S. has ever seen, with the most recent number pegged at 3.7%. Job vacancies across

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all sectors are increasingly difficult to fill, especially roles that require a background in STEM (science, technology, engineering and math). Working under the tough conditions of a factory or plant — whether that perception is accurate or not — might not seem as appealing, or modern, as other job opportunities.

What is true is that the industrial world is largely made up of a deskless workers, which makes up 80% of the global labor force. Rather than having an entire day's work confined to a computer, industrial workers interact with many different and physical touchpoints across the factory floor or out in the field, making organization and communication challenging. Additionally, unlike the corporate world, industrial work is often done in shifts and requires collaboration between tag-team employees to pick up work or processes that are mid-progress.

Mobile-first technology purpose-built for industrial workers enables them to become more agile while on the factory floor and in the field, greatly improving their efficiency and their ability to gain more insight into their work and the various processes in which they're entrenched.

In terms of efficiency, being able to digitize certain manual tasks is a significant time-saver. Technology can streamline and even eliminate time-intensive administrative tasks, such as data entry and paper procedure distribution, to ultimately give time back to workers to focus on more important, strategic work.

The expectations of Gen Z

It's also important to remember that the next crop of talent just starting to enter the workforce, Gen Z, are digital natives. They've only known an on-demand and mobile world. Given that, and given they are our future workforce, it's imperative to meet their workplace expectations and provide them with ways to streamline their work.

Worker connectivity through mobile apps is already a major game-changer for industrial workers, helping them com-

municate better with each other — something that has previously required physically moving from Point A to Point B (and then back to Point A). Mobile communication is not just used for simple back-and-forth texts but, rather, for much more granular correspondence about jobs in progress, including the ability to upload video and images to help others visualize what's been done and what still needs to be done.

Taking it a step further, mobile technology also accelerates time-to-competency and helps bring workers up-to-speed more quickly in their roles — an incredible asset to the onboarding process. This might take the form of on-the-spot mobile videos with step-by-step instructions on how to safely and effectively complete a procedure.

Finally, technology is getting industrial workers and management out of the dark when it comes to operational insights. These might include having a real-time view into the performance of all assets and identifying roadblocks or bottlenecks that are hindering specific processes. This is particularly valuable to leaders and executives, allowing for greater transparency and much more actionable data at their fingertips, which positively impacts their ability to make sound, data-driven operational decisions.

There is so much good that technology can do to help reshape the nature of industrial work. This sector is long due for a facelift, and with it, the right talent will come. **PA**

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