



Mike Feinberg on the Need for Trades-Based Instruction

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Wages in the competitive U.S. skilled labor market rose by more than 20% between the first quarter of 2020 and 2024 — and with an aging workforce, the need for new employees in the field could intensify in the coming years, according to McKinsey & Company analysis.

The company’s research suggests hiring activity for several critical skilled labor proficiencies — including welder, construction laborer, and electrician roles — could be more than 20 times higher than the projected annual increase in new net jobs through 2032.

Programs such as WorkTexas, a nonprofit initiative launched in 2020, address the growing demand for employees with trade-related abilities.

WorkTexas offers training opportunities for Houston-area teens, who can simultaneously earn a high school degree, and adults, who can obtain career-oriented skills by taking evening courses. Co-founder Mike Feinberg says most high school and adult program participants attend for free.

Initially, WorkTexas offered welding, carpentry, construction, auto tech, and residential and commercial electrical certification-related instruction.

“We still train in those fields,” Feinberg says, “We’ve since added [courses on] plumbing and HVAC and building maintenance; [commercial] truck driving; child development associate [work]; [being a] medical assistant; [crane and] rigging; warehouse [management]; logistics, [and] culinary [skills].”

Ongoing Support

Mike Feinberg says the input employers who’ve partnered with WorkTexas have contributed helps differentiate it from other training programs. More than 100 companies in various industries have helped shape WorkTexas’ curriculum.

As a result, program participants learn practical, applicable skills — and companies that operate in the area gain access to a pool of highly qualified candidates.

“We are employer-focused,” Feinberg says. “Our mission is to help people get [and] keep jobs — and advance in careers.”

Once program graduates obtain employment, WorkTexas remains in contact with them for at least five years.

“We’re not just looking at how the students are doing with us this year,” Mike Feinberg says. “We’re interested in what [their situation] looks like, in terms of career contentment — and especially in terms of earning power and creating sustainable lives for themselves, their families and future generations.”

Mike Feinberg on Well-Rounded Workforce Preparation

While pursuing a degree at a four-year college or university is one potential path students can choose to take after high school, it’s not the only type of learning experience employers may value, according to a survey conducted by the nonprofit American Student Assistance organization.

More than two-thirds—68%—believe in proactively hiring candidates without a degree; 72% say they don’t view a degree as a reliable indication of a candidate’s skills.

Today, many employers are looking for workers who can take on trade-related job responsibilities. Feinberg says many have also expressed a desire for other proficiencies, such as the ability to be responsible, communicative, and engaged.

To position program participants for success in the workplace, WorkTexas’ instruction touches on soft skills in addition to information about industry-specific carpentry, welding, and other competencies.” The technical skills are about 30% of what the employers want,” Feinberg says. “The other 70% all say the exact same thing: ‘We need more welders who can lay a bead, electricians who can bend conduit — but what we really need is people who get to work on time; people who can work on a team.’ That’s what everyone needs and wants — so we teach it.”

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