

GUEST COLUMNISTS

The modern vocational college

Connecting employers with work-ready candidates

By Carol Taylor, Rockford Career College

Educators and employers alike live by the law of supply and demand. Employers demand qualified new hires and educators supply them. It's just that simple. But is it? Where can employers go to find high-quality candidates? And how can colleges ensure they're producing graduates who best fit employers' needs?

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, employers increasingly turn to vocational colleges like Rockford Career College (RCC) to fill jobs in skilled trades, such as manufacturing, welding, and nursing—occupations currently facing severe shortages. They not only train students in the classroom, but they also offer real-life experience in the field.

What vocational colleges offer

Working closely with employers, job placement professionals (like me) at vocational colleges can balance the often lopsided, supply-demand equation by helping post jobs, arrange internships, hold workshops and seminars, and manage the interview process.

Modern vocational colleges also offer training in so-called soft skills, so graduates are fully prepared to transition to the workplace. Most important, they gain confidence and learn to show respect and character in the workplace.

Vocational colleges make a point of networking with local employers—from hospitals and law firms to manufacturers and repair services—to learn about the workforce landscape. They also conduct surveys to gather feedback from local employers, and they encourage employers to visit campus and classrooms to see students and faculty in action.

Recently, a representative from a local HVAC company observed a lab class at RCC, where he noticed a student who showed particular promise. He asked the student to give him a call when he was close to graduating, and that student now works for that company.

Finding the right partner

So how should employers go about forging connections with vocational schools?

- Make sure the school is accredited.
- Contact the school's job placement office to discuss your company's needs.
- Visit the school to observe classes and meet with staff.
- Invite instructors or job placement counselors to visit your operation, so they understand the work environment and culture.
- Make sure the school's talent pipeline and candidate referral process align with your needs and timeline.

In our experience, employers are looking to hire candidates faster than ever before. We might get a call from HR on a Friday saying they need to fill a position by Monday. Thanks to our flexibility and familiarity with individual students, we're able to respond quickly.

Crusader Community Health, Bomar Heating & Cooling in Freeport, and Henning Inc. in Machesney Park are just a few of the RCC partners who recognize the value of hiring from vocational colleges.

As Apple founder Steve Jobs said, "Hiring the best is your most important task." I feel really lucky to do what I do helping connect employers and job seekers. Job placement professionals have the chance to change lives every day, helping students get hired for great jobs that translate into lifelong careers. We also help ensure companies are amply staffed so they can operate and flourish. That's why every opportunity to marry a graduate with an employer makes my heart go pitter-patter.

Rockford Career College offers hands-on education and online programs for in-demand careers. Its mission is to give students a relevant, well-rounded occupational education; provide employers with well-prepared graduates; and serve community partners.

The views expressed are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent those of the Greater Rockford Chamber of Commerce.



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