

Reversing the Trend

Recruiting the Next Generation of HVACR Professionals



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Among the many challenges facing the HVACR industry today, perhaps none poses a more significant threat than the growing shortage of qualified service and maintenance technicians. According to recent statistics, 80,000 HVACR technician jobs are currently unfilled — representing 39% of the total industry [workforce](#). At the same time, the industry is losing an estimated 20,000 technician jobs per year due to the retirement of an aging workforce or basic career attrition rates.

In an era of emerging system architectures, technologies and refrigerants with low global warming potential (GWP) — especially within the commercial refrigeration sector — the need for qualified

technicians is greater than ever. Emerson has long been a champion of looking for ways to reverse the technician shortage, collaborating with vocational schools, helping to shape curriculum, and supporting students along their HVACR career journeys.

But solving this problem is an industry-wide obligation that will require the participation of all stakeholders — not only the input of contracting companies, manufacturers, end users, wholesalers and trade associations, but also the perspectives of educators, adjacent industries and government agencies. Fortunately, awareness of the problem's scope continues to grow as our industry looks for new ways to solve it.

Changing perceptions: *Making HVACR cool again*

Although it's difficult to pinpoint the cause of the declining interest in HVACR professions over the past decades, industry insiders attribute it to a variety of misperceptions and preconceptions, namely:

- HVACR professions are unglamorous and/or not important.
- Workers within HVACR professions do not utilize cutting-edge or state-of-the-art technologies.
- There is an overall cultural devaluing of trade professions compared to the more widely accepted value of a traditional four-year college education.
- Some Americans believe that HVACR professionals do not make a competitive wage or have long-term career path opportunities.

For high-school aged students considering a career path or adults pursuing a career change, there's no question that these long-held misperceptions have gotten in the way of recruitment. And with potential young entrants inundated with social media streams that often present unrealistic, idealized views of professions (and the four-year college experience), it can be difficult to change these perceptions.

But upon closer inspection, it takes relatively little effort to dispel these myths. In fact, HVACR technician jobs check important boxes for many professionals that four-year college degrees simply cannot. It's important for all industry stakeholders

to understand, highlight and promote these differentiating factors in order to paint a more realistic

— and positive — picture of modern HVACR professions. These proof points not only form effective counterarguments to common misperceptions but could inspire students and those currently in the labor pool to reconsider a career in HVACR:

- **Have a meaningful career that makes an impact** — HVACR professionals are on the front line implementing new environmentally friendly solutions and technologies that will play an integral role in making the world a better place to live.
- **Work with cutting-edge tools and technologies** — Modern refrigeration and AC applications utilize advanced controls, software and remote diagnostics capabilities.
- **Achieve job security** — With little competition for available jobs, HVACR professionals are virtually guaranteed employment and enter into a field with both long-term security and growth potential.
- **Earn while you learn** — HVACR technicians can earn a competitive wage with a two-year vocational certification and have the option to augment the certification process with on-the-job training in apprenticeship programs.



Supporting vocational schools and students at the local level

Industry stakeholders agree that one of the most effective strategies for recruiting the next generation of HVACR technicians and beginning to change perceptions is to engage locally by supporting vocational schools and technical colleges. Combined with incentives from state governance, industry-sponsored scholarship programs and pre-apprenticeship opportunities, we have seen tangible examples of how this local model can inspire a lifelong passion in HVACR careers.

With our [Helix Innovation Center](#) located near the University of Dayton campus, Emerson often interacts with students enrolled in nearby Ohio vocational schools. We recently offered a pre-apprenticeship opportunity to Nicholas Didier, a student attending the Miami Valley Career Technology Center (MVCTC) near Dayton. His experience demonstrates how private companies, industry and local governance can combine to inspire, educate and support our youth in the discovery of HVACR careers.

As a high school senior enrolled in the Heating Ventilation and Air Conditioning (HVAC) Program at the MVCTC, Didier was interested in learning more about the basics of refrigeration and getting hands-on HVACR field experience. But what he got from his time at The Helix was a much more in-depth understanding of the challenges facing our industry, a greater overview of the service profession and the desire to explore system design.



Nicholas Didier (left), Miami Valley Career Technology Center student and winner of the Today's Opportunities Offering Lifetime Skills program, met with Ohio Lieutenant Governor Jon Husted (center) to discuss the state's upcoming initiatives to promote career, technical and vocational schools.

His responsibilities at The Helix included building, prototyping and developing products, but he was particularly inspired by listening to staff conversations about current industry challenges and learning new information about the opportunities available in HVACR-related professions.

"I love to learn the mechanical aspects of a trade, and my time at The Helix reinforced my decision to pursue a career in HVACR," said Didier. "The heartbeat of our country is in skilled trades, and the HVACR technician shortage provides an opportunity for students like me to have an exciting career."



Didier's passion and accomplishments also helped him to win a new Ford Ranger truck and a \$1,000 scholarship from the Today's Opportunities Offering Lifetime Skills (TOOLS) program — a scholarship sponsored by the Ohio Valley Chapter of the Associated Builders and Contractors (ABC). Didier said he plans on using the money to purchase tools for the HVACR technician trade and further his education.

In addition, Ohio Lieutenant Governor Jon Husted, who serves as the director of the Governor's Office of Workforce Transformation, recognized Didier's exemplary efforts when he recently visited local career centers. Husted took the time to speak with students in various programs about their decisions to attend vocational school and/or achieve college credits. He emphasized the career paths available to these students — with and without a college education

— and then detailed the state's upcoming initiatives to promote career, technical and vocational schools.

Commitment to a brighter future

Helping to solve the HVACR technician shortage is just one way Emerson is committed to ensuring a brighter future for our served industries. We promote science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) educational programs designed to help prepare the next generation of critical thinkers and problem solvers. Today, the urgent need for skilled technicians requires the type of local level engagement to raise awareness of not only the growing problem, but also present evergreen opportunities for young people seeking a viable long-term career in lieu of a four-year college education.

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