

EMPLOYER PROFILE:

Ralph H. Simpson Co.

An Illinois manufacturer uses the Industrial Manufacturing Technician apprenticeship program to build its workers' skills.

Take it from Kristopher Haas: Manufacturing companies should consider bringing on the Industrial Manufacturing Technician (IMT) apprenticeship program.

Haas, president of Ralph H. Simpson Co., oversees 28 employees at the Elmhurst, Illinois, steel manufacturer. He has seen the industry-wide crunch of skilled trade workers and jumped at the opportunity to provide comprehensive training to his team.

“It was kind of a no-brainer,” said Haas. “The better the workers I have out there, the better my product is.”

In 2017, Ralph H. Simpson was able to capitalize on the IMT apprenticeship program through the Iron Workers Local 473 union, which had partnered with the Chicago Federation of Labor Workforce & Community Initiative (the CFL Initiative), a nonprofit organization sponsored and endorsed by the CFL. The partnership's goal was to raise awareness of and interest in the IMT program among employers of union members.

The IMT apprenticeship targets new and incumbent frontline production workers to increase the number of qualified individuals who enter mid-level and highly skilled occupations in the manufacturing sector. As part of the 2015 national American Apprenticeship Initiative grant from the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL), nonprofit JFF received funding to expand its work in establishing and promoting the IMT apprenticeship with multiple partners, including the CFL Initiative.

At Ralph H. Simpson, the various organizations' efforts coalesced to the benefit of the business and its employees.

As part of the program, Haas's initial cohort of five apprentices learned crucial skills in blueprint reading, welding, and math, as well as Occupational Safety and Health Administration standards. “Having the apprenticeship program, I could move my workers along quicker,” he said. “And people who were here for a few years were able to improve their skills.”

The Industrial Manufacturing Technician (IMT) apprenticeship program provides frontline manufacturing production workers with the knowledge and competencies needed in the advanced manufacturing environment.



As part of the DOL funding, employers like Ralph H. Simpson were able to participate in the related instruction portion of the apprenticeship program at no cost. However, after seeing firsthand the benefits to his company and his employees, Haas said he would be open to contributing to the cost in the future. He thinks other small employers should as well. “I don’t see why you wouldn’t,” he said. “It’s about developing that skilled workforce.”

Four of the five of employees who completed Ralph H. Simpson’s apprenticeship program have stayed on with the company and are developing higher-quality products as a result of the training, Haas said. Additionally, thanks to the IMT apprenticeship program, the workers are now cross-trained so they can step in for one another when needed—an advantage for a company with a small workforce.

“If I can get my workers more skilled in what they do, that’s better for me, and that’s better for them as well,” Haas said.

This workforce product was funded by a grant awarded by the U.S. Department of Labor’s Employment and Training Administration. The product was created by the recipient and does not necessarily reflect the official position of the U.S. Department of Labor.

