How Do We Attract Technicians to Our Industry?

by Mark Reiter
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The shortage of diesel technicians has been a concern for some time. Recent statistics from the U.S. Department of Labor offer some reason for cautious optimism. Employment of diesel service technicians and mechanics is expected to grow by 12% from 2014 to 2024, faster than the average for all occupations.

But will the industry have enough trained technicians to meet this anticipated demand?

According to the National Institute for Automotive Service Excellence, training for such technicians may be on the upswing. As of June 2019, the number of people who hold that organization's ASE Student Certifications had increased by 10.2% year over year. And the number of certifications possessed by truck-specific technicians, who are working in the industry, increased as well.

One issue of concern, however: in that same timeframe, the actual number of truck-specific technicians counted by ASE declined by 2.9%, to 31,914, from 32,900 in 2018.

And that raises a challenge for those of us in trucking: Are we doing enough to attract technicians to our industry in particular? After all, diesel technicians could be working in the automobile or agriculture business, instead of trucking.

Simply put, our industry has a lot of competition.

That's one reason Navistar is working hard to make our products as technician-friendly as possible. Our "Voice of the Technician" initiative pursues detailed feedback from technicians about what they like and don't like about working on our products in particular. We talk to technicians at our customers, our dealers and even the dealers of our competitors, and incorporate their insights into our new and updated vehicle models.

We're also looking beyond our own vehicles to help the technical schools who are the source of the industry's future technicians. For many years, we've donated International® trucks, engines and other equipment to technical schools nationwide. We've also provided technical schools with software and other solutions designed to enhance the learning experience.

Most recently, we teamed up with our International® dealer network on an integrated program to supply accredited technical schools with training equipment and real-world advisory counsel. The new program enlists our network to donate vehicles, serve on the schools' advisory committees, help develop curriculum, and provide the students with career opportunities.

The value of this kind of partnership is attested to by dealers and technical schools alike.

"Sustaining students' career interest in becoming heavy-duty technicians is essential to our industry," says Scott Hoffman, director of service for Mid-State Truck Service, a Wisconsin-based dealer. "We feel it's our responsibility to help attract applicants to the field and provide them with proper technical training, relevant equipment and career opportunities."

The value of dealer involvement is in turn verified by Ryan Kawski, dean of Advanced Manufacturing & Engineering and Transportation, Agriculture, Natural Resources & Construction at Mid-State Technical College in Wisconsin Rapids, Wisc.

"Mid-State Truck Service has been a long-time member of the advisory committee for our Diesel & Heavy Equipment Technician programs," Kawski

says. “Their involvement ensures we’re properly preparing our students to best serve their future employer and, ultimately, the end customer.”

The mere existence of programs like these doesn’t guarantee our industry a robust flow of technicians in the future. But the enthusiastic involvement of dealers who are committed to the real-world mission of customer uptime is a very encouraging and positive sign – and something we’re doing everything in our power to encourage.

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