



TOP 5 TRAINING TRENDS FOR MANUFACTURING IN 2026

Tool Up Your Talent

What Your Workforce Needs to Perform, Adapt, and Stay Safe on the Floor and Beyond.

Manufacturing organizations are navigating a workforce inflection point. Baby Boomer retirements are accelerating the loss of institutional knowledge, automation is reshaping roles faster than training programs can adapt, and safety expectations are higher than ever. The manufacturers building resilient, competitive operations are the ones treating workforce development as a core operational strategy.

01

KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER FROM RETIRING WORKERS IS NOW URGENT

An estimated 25 percent of the manufacturing workforce is eligible for retirement within the next five years, taking decades of process knowledge, troubleshooting expertise, and institutional memory with them. Organizations that have not built structured knowledge capture and transfer programs are facing operational risk that cannot be solved by hiring alone. The window to act is closing.

Key Takeaway: *Launch a formal knowledge capture program now. Identify your highest-risk knowledge holders and build transfer plans before they walk out the door.*

02

AUTOMATION READINESS TRAINING IS A COMPETITIVE DIFFERENTIATOR

As cobots, automated quality systems, and AI-driven production monitoring become standard equipment, the workforce capability gap between manufacturers who train for automation and those who do not is widening rapidly. Workers who understand how to operate alongside automated systems, and how to troubleshoot when they fail, are significantly more productive and less likely to leave for competitors who offer better development opportunities.

Key Takeaway: *Build automation literacy into your standard training curriculum, not as a separate technical program, but as a core workforce competency.*

03

SAFETY TRAINING MUST MOVE FROM COMPLIANCE TO BEHAVIOR CHANGE

OSHA recordable incidents remain stubbornly persistent in organizations where safety training is treated as a compliance exercise rather than a behavior change program. The manufacturers with the strongest safety cultures have moved to scenario-based, skills-verified training that builds genuine hazard recognition and safe behavior, not just the ability to pass a test.

Key Takeaway: *Redesign your safety programs around demonstrated behavior, not completed modules. Verification matters more than completion.*



04

FRONTLINE SUPERVISOR DEVELOPMENT IS BEING CHRONICALLY UNDERINVESTED

The frontline supervisor is the most influential person in a manufacturing worker's experience, directly affecting retention, safety performance, quality outcomes, and productivity. Yet most organizations promote their best technical performers into supervisor roles with minimal leadership development. The operational cost of undertrained supervisors is measurable and significant.

Key Takeaway: Build a structured frontline leader development program that treats supervision as a distinct skill set, separate from technical proficiency.

05

CONNECTING TRAINING INVESTMENT TO OPERATIONAL METRICS IS NOW EXPECTED

Operations and finance leaders are increasingly asking L&D teams to demonstrate the connection between training programs and plant-level outcomes: OEE, scrap rates, incident frequency, and time-to-productivity for new hires. The manufacturing L&D teams earning sustained investment are the ones who built measurement into their programs from the design stage and can speak in the language of the plant floor.

Key Takeaway: Define your training ROI metrics before you launch programs, not after. Align to the numbers your plant managers and VP of Ops already own.

Your Workforce Is Your Competitive Advantage, Are You Building It Intentionally?

Visit VPS Learning at **Booth #6** during **TICE, June 16-18**, and learn how leading manufacturers are closing skill gaps, reducing incidents, and building the operational capability to compete in a rapidly changing industry.

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