

Our family business, GKM Auto Parts, operates three stores in eastern Ohio. We have been in business for almost 15 years. As a small business, our 19 employees are a valuable asset to our company. Well trained, knowledgeable employees are one of the keys to the success, stability, and growth potential for any business, especially a small business.

In the past few years, it has been challenging for businesses to fill open positions with quality candidates. There is a shortage, particularly in our region, of qualified candidates for highly skilled positions. National Federation of Independent Businesses, reported the from the results of a member survey in 2019 that “Twenty-two percent of small employers who have hired an employee for their most-skilled position in the last two years lowered the minimum qualifications for applicants that they previously required, and 24 percent lowered them for the most common, less skilled position.” As a leadership member of NFIB, I hear firsthand that hiring and retaining qualified employees, particularly in the technical and mechanical trades, is hindering the operations of small businesses. When a less than qualified candidate is hired, improving that employee’s skills puts a strain on the tight margins with which small businesses normally operate and puts a strain on the timeframe of production. Money in the budget which could be spent on hiring additional employees is spent on training the less than qualified new hires. Finding the time to train is also a significant burden to the small business owners.

This challenge has become more pronounced post COVID-19 pandemic. Small businesses, who furloughed workers in order to stay solvent during work shutdowns and slowdowns, are reporting that some workers are slow to return, primarily due to the Federal stimulus that enhanced their unemployment benefits. The investment in time and treasure in these employees’ training is a significant loss when they won’t return to the workforce. It is creating a strain on the companies when they can least afford this.

Local education, at all levels, primary, secondary and post graduate, is focused on developing the skills needed for the jobs available in my area of Ohio. The recent state budget decreases to schools in Ohio due to the pandemic will impact this goal. When schools can achieve this goal, the financial burden on an employer is eased and the employee would enter the job with the skill set at a level to be productive. Training budgets could then be spent on boosting the employee’s skills or on wages to retain that employee, benefiting both the employee and the employer. Also valuable to small businesses is a focused and robust re-training program available to assist displaced workers and adults with a desire to “learn a new trade”. A larger investment in this arena would reap the benefits not just to the employer but also to the quality of life for an employee and the community.