

GETTING AHEAD OF THE Skills Gap



Exclusive ASA data and analysis reveal the hardest U.S. jobs to fill right now, and point toward at least four specific strategies staffing companies and their clients can adopt to help bridge the disconnect between what employers say they want and what prospective employees can provide.

By Cynthia Poole

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What began as a unique challenge and buzz term after the economy recovered from the Great Recession is now a persistent and potentially broadening issue—the skills gap.

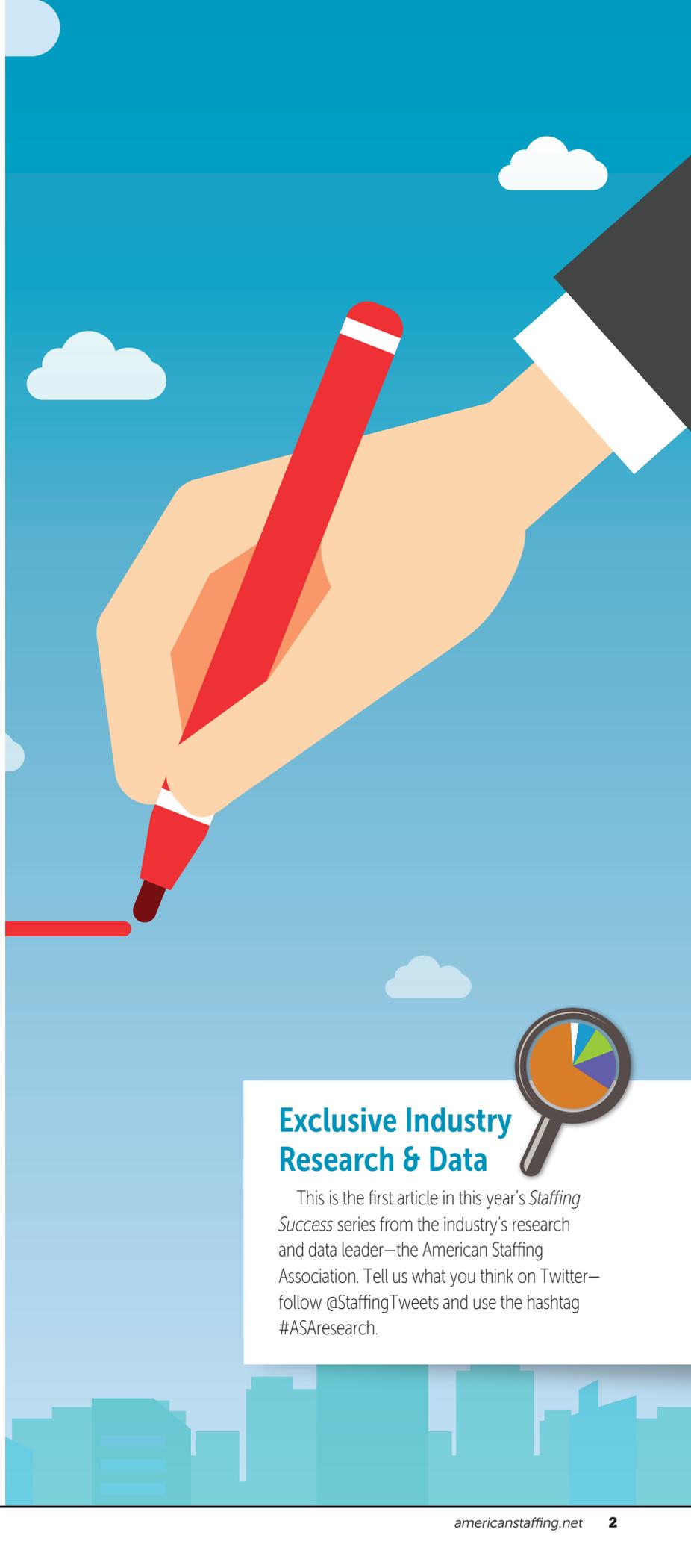
Businesses continue to struggle in their search for employees with what they perceive to be the necessary experience, skills, and training to fill open positions. The issue becomes even more complex because so many in the talent pool are not prepared to fill many of the higher-skilled jobs currently open.

There's no doubt that the skills gap continues to have a negative effect on many businesses, including staffing companies. However, this analysis explores ways in which the staffing and recruiting industry can turn this challenge into an opportunity to partner with and assist clients in bridging the skills gap.

ANALYZING THE SKILLS GAP

The skills gap will continue to widen as the economy strengthens and unemployment continues to fall. Today, more than seven million people are actively looking for work, while more than five million jobs are going unfilled. Plus, only six out of 10 working-age individuals are currently employed or even looking for a job—and that is exacerbated by an aging workforce and an increasing number of people dropping out of the labor pool.

Wages in many industries have stagnated, and many employers have not been willing to offer more competitive salaries to attract the specialized talent they need. Employers also often have unrealistic expectations of the skills that job applicants should bring to the table, frequently not considering the cost benefit of hiring a candidate otherwise qualified and providing necessary training for specialized skills. >>>



Exclusive Industry Research & Data



This is the first article in this year's *Staffing Success* series from the industry's research and data leader—the American Staffing Association. Tell us what you think on Twitter—follow @StaffingTweets and use the hashtag #ASAresearch.

WHAT IS THE SKILLS GAP?

Perceived mismatch between the needs of employers for skilled talent and the skills possessed by the available workforce.

WHY IS THERE A SKILLS GAP?

- Shortage of skilled talent
- Wages insufficient to attract specialized talent
- Unrealistic expectations of job applicant training and experience
- Students are not being properly prepared for the real world of work
- Lack of on-the-job training

ASA research and analysis suggests that to build a workforce that meets the needs of 21st century jobs, education and training must play a larger role in preparing youth and adult workers to fill the voids in specific occupations—voids that continue to grow, in part, by retiring baby boomers and evolving technology.

LEARNING FROM THE DATA

The ASA Skills Gap Index, established in 2014, utilizes a hiring indicator developed by CareerBuilder. The hiring indicator measures the level of difficulty (on a scale of one to 100, with lower scores indicating harder-to-fill jobs) to fill a specific occupation based on demand (job postings), supply of active candidates, and all individuals working in the occupation.

The ASA Skills Gap Index focuses on hiring indicator scores of 50 or less for hard-to-fill occupations with a demand of 2,000 jobs or more to determine the top hard-to-fill occupations.

The latest ASA Skills Gap Index identified 196 difficult-to-fill occupations in the U.S. The two hardest-to-fill jobs in each staffing industry sector are:

Engineering, Information Technology, and Scientific

- Computer and information research scientists
- Information security analysts

Health Care

- Psychiatrists
- General internists

Industrial

- Heavy and tractor-trailer truck drivers
- Bus and truck mechanics and diesel engine specialists

Office–Clerical and Administrative

- Interviewers, except eligibility and loan
- Sales floor stock clerks

Professional–Managerial

- Tax preparers
- Police patrol officers

ASA Skills Gap Index reports summarize the variances in hiring indicators and salary by specific industries and regions, making these reports valuable tools for staffing companies when addressing the skills gap by specific areas of focus.

EFFECTIVELY BRIDGING THE GAP

Depending on the particular challenges any staffing company may be facing, there are a variety of approaches that have been successfully employed to narrow industry skills gaps and those of clients. These include

- Reassessing position requirements
- Training otherwise qualified candidates
- Paying higher wages for specialized skills
- Making total compensation packages more attractive

ASA has developed resources to help staffing companies present a skills gap overview and to guide challenging conversations with clients on this topic. These resources include case studies that focus on several approaches for bridging the skills gap.

The skills gap persists and doesn't appear to have narrowed significantly, nor is it expected to in the near term. Whether your staffing company is looking to deepen its own talent pool or partner with a client to increase its pipeline of qualified candidates, taking a closer look at your approach to recruitment may be the next step in addressing skills gap challenges. ■

Cynthia Poole is the director of research for ASA. Send your feedback on this article to success@americanstaffing.net. Engage with ASA on social media—go to americanstaffing.net/social. To find ASA Skills Gap Index resources, visit americanstaffing.net/asa-skills-gap.



BRIDGING THE SKILLS GAP IN THE HEALTH CARE SECTOR

CHALLENGE

Client had significant issues filling surgical tech positions requiring level I trauma, ortho, neuro, and teaching-facility experience.

SOLUTION

Since reducing the position's requirements to either ortho or neuro experience, the client no longer has issues finding surgical techs.