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Local panel discusses what will be needed to get, retain jobs in the future

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The Green Bay Press-Gazette invited local business and education representatives recently to discuss jobs, careers and the local employment market.

The panel included:

- Paul Rauscher, president of EMT International in Hobart
- Geoffrey Rulland, talent acquisition manager with Humana Inc., De Pere
- Jean Marsch, director of human resources at St. Vincent Hospital, Green Bay, and Green Bay School Board president
- Jim Golembeski, executive director of Bay Area Workforce Development Board, Green Bay
- Sandy Ryczkowski, vice president of human resources at Northeastern Wisconsin Technical College, Green Bay

Q. Is there a worker shortage, or is there a job shortage?

Rauscher: On the manufacturing side, there definitely is a worker shortage. Most manufacturers I know in this area right now are hiring, and most manufacturers are having trouble finding people, believe that or not. Even though our unemployment rate is dropping in this area, it's still pretty high, and yet we are seeing shortages, especially in the skills areas.

Marsch: From the health care perspective, I'm seeing both. There is a shortage of highly skilled, experienced people in some areas, such as in physical therapy, in specific nursing roles, but there is also an abundance of workers applying for some of our more entry-level positions, such as in housekeeping and food services. We don't have as many jobs in those areas as we once had.

Ryczkowski: From the educational perspective, we are seeing a shortage of both jobs as well as workers. Baby boomers retiring, the aging population ... we've seen that there has been a shortage of workers.

Rulland: For us, it's a little bit of both. Our business has shifted a little bit over the last few years as we try to keep up with the changing needs of our members and our customers.

I think there is a worker shortage in some specific areas and a couple that I would mention for us at Humana would be in the actuarial space, pharmacists and medical directors.

Golembeski: In my broader perspective, looking at cross-sectors of the work force, there is just an ongoing mismatch between the skills sets and the attitudes that many of our job seekers bring and what the employers expect.

Q. What needs to be done to get workers, particularly unqualified workers, to improve their situations?

Golembeski: When I deal with folks who are really kind of on the bottom rungs of the job search, my mantra today is No. 1, stop smoking. No. 2, get control of your weight. And No. 3, what have you read lately?

The 21st century is demanding things that were not demanded in the 20th century and so much of it goes back to personal responsibility for your own wellness, for your own retirement and for your own lifelong learning.

Marsch: We need people who have basic computer skills. Even our most entry-level positions require basic keyboarding, the ability to navigate and read e-mail and open attachments and get information through the computer.

If you're competing for jobs at the entry-level and you don't have the skills, we can get people with those skills because the people coming out of high school have them.

I wouldn't fall into the trap of thinking entry level means very little education. Entry level to employers means you have the skills needed to communicate, to problem solve, to be able to handle analytical situations that come along, treating customers the way customers want to be treated. Those things are all important.

Rulland: One of the journeys that Humana is on is to help people achieve lifelong well being. It's really what we as an organization are striving to do, so when I hear somebody say "I tell people stop smoking, do things like that", that's really the kinds of things that are important to us as an organization. We want people that are innovative thinkers and are curious to learn, and not just settling for the way things were 10 years ago.

Rauscher: We have to quit telling them that you're either a four-year grad or you're a hamburger flipper. Somehow we have to get out of that mode of telling students that if you don't go on to a four-year school you're a nobody.

You need skills. How you attain them, what you do with them, is not a direct result of the educational level that you're going to go to.

Way too many students going into colleges today have no clue what they're going to do, what they want to do. They come out with a four-year-degree and don't have a job and don't have a chance of getting a job.

And there's people that go to a two-year-school that can come out and do every bit as well or better than some of the folks coming out of a four-year school.

Ryczkowski: The employers of today and the educational institutions are really training for jobs that — we don't know what those jobs might be several years from now — so the problem-solving skills that we've mentioned and so on are really important.

Marsch: The interview that we put people through is much more sophisticated than it ever was, and I think that other companies would agree. We are looking for people who can problem-solve even at the entry-level position.

We are looking for people who can get along with other people, are good team players, are flexible. I think that technical schools provide a great deal of resources for people that we would hire. Many of our colleagues do not have four-year degrees and there are very good-paying jobs in the technical field.

Q. When people think of hi-tech, they think of Madison and Silicon Valley. How hi-tech is Northeastern Wisconsin?

Rulland: From an innovation perspective — that's really the word I would use in lieu of hi-tech for Humana — one of our IT applications engineering vice presidents ... was the 2011 Computer World Premier 100 IT Leaders Award (winner). It honors IT leaders who enable technology to drive business growth. This is a global award, and this is actually the third time one of our IT executives has won the award in the last seven years.

That type of leadership and innovative thought is what's driving our business.

A couple of the innovative things I'd just like to mention is we have a lot of mobile web and app technology that is being worked on for all the things you would think about when you enroll in benefits: when you find a physician, when you are trying to determine which is the right prescription and where should I get it filled.

Marsch: Hospitals are hi-tech places — laboratories, radiology, surgery, even our medical records — it's hi-tech. We need workers who balance the ability to work in the hi-tech field with people who are caring because we must never forget that we are taking care of patients.

Golembeski: My thought would be again to kind of contrast the 20th century with the 21st century. In the 20th century, the smart kids went off to college, the so-called dumb kids stayed home and went to the factory, and that just isn't the way it is anymore.

There simply are fewer and fewer places in the economy for the "C" and "D" student— the kind of mediocre students or even the mediocre people — to go. You have to be talented today.

Unfortunately, I think in many cases our K-12 school systems have not adjusted to that, or the support systems for the K-12 schools haven't adjusted to that.

We need students to come out of school having really developed their talents, really developed their interests, prepared to learn, with these kinds of attitudes that you hear around customer services, around career direction. If you are a 20th-century person looking for a job in the 21st century, you're going to be very frustrated.

Q. What advice do you have for people who still have jobs? What does their future hold and how do they hold onto those jobs?

Marsch: Someone mentioned the term lifelong learning and I don't think I can emphasize that enough.

The best advice I give is always give your company more than you think they expect. Exceed expectations. Always be curious and be willing to learn more and volunteer to do extra projects. Develop yourself, even if it's on your own time.

Ryczkowski: I think it's always important, too, to come forward with recommendations and not problems. Be creative, think of solutions, and help your employer develop a plan to get to the next step. Be that proactive, positive person in the work force. That really means a lot to an employer.

Golembeski: Things change so quickly. Just think of something simple like a typewriter or a carburetor. They were absolute mainstays of our society not that long ago. They're all done.

A piece of technology can come in and change the way any of us in the room run our business and our employees need to constantly be ready to upgrade, ready to help the company, ready to understand what adds value.

Every worker has to take some responsibility for their company and understanding what's their technology, what's their niche. It has to go way beyond 'this is my little piece of the puzzle.'

Rauscher: You have to embrace change today. You can't get your feet in the mud and say that's the way we've always done it and that's the way we're going to do it again. It won't lead to success. Constant improvement absolutely is a must.

You have to be ready for change, you have to embrace change, you have to be part of change. If you're going to be one of those folks who doesn't want to and you're in the work force, there's a good chance you won't be in it for long because companies can't do that. You just can't afford it.

And you know what? It's not a lot of fun for some people. And for older folks like myself, there's a lot of change I don't like. The choice is either lose your job or change.

Ryczkowski: The question used to be 'well when is this change going to be over?' And now the answer is 'we're always going to be in a state of change.' We're always looking to improve processes and you have to be part of that.

Rulland: Everything that's being said around this topic is applicable to just about any organization.

You can continue to learn and continue to be better at what you do today. It isn't a direct correlation to 'if I go further my education it means I can become a manager, right?' It's not always that upward movement. Sometimes it's just to keep your skills updated.

Golembeski: I went over to West High School and spoke to a group of sophomores, and they were the 'C' and 'D' students. I looked at this group of about 25 of them and said if I could tell you one thing during your high school years, find something here that you're excited about. And it can't be a boyfriend or girlfriend, you're not going to be a professional ballplayer and you're not going to be a rap star.

But other than those things, find something that you are excited about while you're here. If I go into a position and I'm excited about it, then I want to learn and I want to grow and I want to develop.

Q. What is the government's level of participation in this process? How much can we afford, and how much can we afford not to do?

Golembeski: We have to collaborate better. Our educational systems, across the board, from K-12 to the tech college to the university, in the past have operated pretty much in their own little spheres without talking to each other very well. We are seeing that break down and that has to continue to break down so that we have this continuum and this connection.

Ryczkowski: We need to continue with those collaborations, but we need to make it seamless for the students to move from what they start with, to what they think they might move to, what they didn't think they would move to and so on.

Marsch: We have some examples of successes and one of those is actually in health care. In high school you can become a nursing assistant and then you can move to the technical college, become an LPN, and then continue on in the program to become a registered nurse.

That's a success, but I do agree that we need to take more careers and develop that pathway for students so that they can see how the learning can progress to a career that could last a lifetime.

Rauscher: From a manufacturing perspective again, there is a real need for quality education. I don't think it equates to money. I think too often we say 'how much money did you spend' and that means we've got a quality education, and I think there's a big mistake there.

Industry would never operate like that. Too often, I think education does.

And I think there has to be some streamlining. There are so many different kinds of training programs and grants and this and that. It's just a lot of money thrown against the wall to see what sticks sometimes.

We have to get the word out to people that this is the kind of training, you can get it, you can get a job and there's a good job out there.

Golembeski: If there was one thing I would change, particularly about our K-12 system, it would be that we cut back on giving information, testing kids to know the dates and the names, because people have more information at their fingertips than any generation's ever had.

(We need) a lot more learning around handling information, evaluating information, dealing with information, rather than memorizing information. A key change we still need to make in many parts of our education system.

From left, Paul Rauscher of EMT International, Geoffrey Rulland of Humana Inc., Jean Marsch of St. Vincent Hospital, Jim Golembeski of Bay Area Workforce Development Board and Sandy Ryczkowski of Northeast Wisconsin Technical College participate in a Green Bay Press-Gazette jobs discussion panel earlier this month. / Corey Wilson/Press-Gazette

