



FOCUS GROUPS

Brainerd

Brainerd High School

March 27, 2018

We are joined today by a half-dozen students in the welding program at Central Lake Community College and a half-dozen students from Brainerd High School. Let's start with the welding students, right? What influenced you to enter that program?

- NAME, last year's welding teacher. I had a couple of classes with him throughout my high school career and he definitely swayed my opinion towards manufacturing. He taught me the basics, this is how you keep an arc going, this is how you keep travel speed and what not. It really got me interested.
- Same thing with me. I was basically the only girl in welding. He always sat and helped me throughout my entire high school career, because I was in welding since my sophomore year. I was kind of nervous, being the only girl going into the class. I got a welding certificate and a welding award for it. I actually didn't plan on going to Brainerd at first. I planned on going to either Mesabi or moving to Oklahoma for college, but looking back, I'm glad I chose CLC, just for the pure fact that I'm close to my family and Oklahoma would have pushed me away, I guess.

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What did you think about in terms of a career? Do you know people that do welding professionally?

- My senior year, I was pretty nervous about college and getting everything done. One of my dad's best friends actually is a pipeliner. I met up with him and he kind of really peaked my interest in that. I went to Ohio with my dad to visit the pipeline that was going through there, and I sat there and watched what the welders were doing and the welders' helpers and it just clicked and that's what I want to do now.
- I've been around welding my whole life. My dad's a welder and stuff and he ... I kind of liked doing it in the garage all the time. I took class this year in Brainerd for welding. Then basically, I just liked it a lot, so kept going through it. I'm not exactly sure what I want to do after my career yet.
- Well, my welding teacher in high school really peaked my interest in it. I took his classes probably, I don't know, three or four times every semester. He taught me everything about welding, besides what I learned in college now. He really pushed me to go for what I wanted to achieve in life, like careers and what not in the welding field. I guess, that's just what peaked my interest. I've been around welding throughout my whole life.

What do you like about it?

- I don't know. It's just kind of a cool factor, that you're building things with your hands and you know, making things that can help people in the manufacturing world.
- For me, I needed a career change. I was in construction for the past 25 years and I was just getting burned out with that stuff and I've always been interested in welding. I liked the smaller campus up here in Brainerd, so that's why I decided to come here. I liked working with my hands anyways and then to be able to build stuff, that's what I enjoy. Seeing the finished product when you get done.

Alright. High school guys. Anybody thinking about going to Central Lakes or somewhere else? Have you decided where you want to go yet after high school?

- CLC in Staples. Robotics. They have a really good program there, my friend's in it and they also have robotic welding, too. If you're doing our course, you can go over there, get some credits over there and you can get a

robotic welding degree, too.

- I'm thinking of going to NDSU for mechanical engineering.
- Twin Cities. Microbiology.
- I actually want to pursue medicine, but I do like welding. I have a welder at home, and I do that on the side for fun.
- I'm either looking into UMD for mechanical engineering or for sign language interpreting.

People are saying that the worker shortage is going to hit a crisis level within five years. Did that impact your decision?

- I looked into it. The job growth expectancy rate was pretty high, compared to other fields, so that's definitely a factor that influenced my decision.
- There is definitely a higher percentage of people getting a job out of school for welding than all the other construction trades. Basically, when you're done with college, you can get a job very easily, in the field that you want to do.

Manufacturers sometimes say that parents, school counselors and teachers dissuade students from wanting to pursue anything other than a four-year degree. True?

- Ever since I was 10, my mom kept telling me, "You're going to a four-year college." She got kind of pissed off at me when I told her I wanted to go to CLC instead.
- Show her your first paycheck.
- My brother went to Alexandria Tech for a two-year degree, and I feel like his job that he has now is a good career for him and sometimes, if you go to a four-year degree and get a good job, it's the same.
- They don't really tell you about how a lot of manufacturing jobs pay better. They want you to go more into the professional office jobs, rather than the hands-on jobs. Probably around the time they were in college, those were the high-paying jobs. A lot of them don't think about how often the change is

- It was the same with my school but during my junior and senior year, they actually focused more on the manufacturing jobs because we actually had construction in our schooling. We had welding, we had woodworking, we had robotics and electronics and we had outdoor classes for people who were interested in fisheries or DNR stuff.
- I did not meet with my school counselor throughout my entire high school career, maybe one time. They are just not that important to me.
- I've talked to them only to get my schedule changed, when they gave me the wrong classes. That's the extent of what I've done with them.
- That's the thing.
- To get myself back in the shop classes that they switched on me.
- Yeah. Me, too. That was basically the only reason.
- When I didn't get the shop class I wanted to take for college, I had to go in there and have it changed. They weren't very willing. They were willing to work with you but they didn't like that I wanted to change back.
- It seems like the counselors are just more focused on the kids who are having behavioral issues or really struggling in school, which is important and all. I didn't even know who my counselor was until this year because I just had to ask a question about credits for my senior year.
- It's like, I feel like they just kind of push ... Like, "Oh, you're doing okay in school, I don't need to really worry about you," which kind of defeats the purpose of having a counselor to help you make decisions.
- They are there just to help the school really. I don't really go to them for life advice or career advice, just more school advice.
- My mom is actually one of the school counselors. There's so few counselors. They just laid off two more counselors. I think there's one counselor per, I think, 500 students.
- I had my engineering and design class knocked for a required health wellness fitness course and a foods course. Oh yes, because I need to cook a cake, instead of engineering.

- Some are your close teachers. I thought when I graduated last year, my shop teacher was actually my biggest influence and everything. If I needed help with something, I'd go to him or the woodworking teacher. I just connected with those people better. I did have some good teachers in other classes that I talked to, as well.
- I never had anybody try talking me out of (welding). They never tried to push me towards anything else. From the technical side of the school or whatever, the tech outside, I've never had them push me towards doing a two-year or anything.

How about your parents? Are they the most important influencers?

- Big time. My dad pushed me towards a lot of manufacturing stuff. He kind of knew that I wouldn't be able to handle sitting behind a desk. He always pushed me towards doing something with my hands and stuff. I got pushed into welding. I thought I was going to hate it at first. I absolutely dreaded going to welding. Then the first week, I just fell in love with it. It's just the fact that I was the only girl, and I was proving everybody wrong because there were so many doubters, and just making my dad happy was a big influence on me, too.

How hard is the schoolwork at Central Lakes?

- As long as you apply yourself, you should be able to do it. If you come out of high school with a bad work ethic and you're just like, "Oh, I'm just going to do what I did my senior year, slide by," that won't work.
- You have to actually do the work and apply yourself daily. I wouldn't say it's hard.
- You have to push yourself and you have to pay attention.
- If you work, it will help you through it. There were a few kids that did not apply themselves and they just ... I mean, they failed every class.
- Or they dropped out.
- They dropped out because they didn't like the teacher because the teacher wouldn't give them what they wanted. Well they didn't work, they were always leaving class.

How about in high school?

- I take a bunch of AP classes, Advanced Placement, which are basically college level courses anyway, so I just always try and work really hard, so that way college won't be a huge leap for me, once I go there.

You're wearing a robotics team shirt. Does that help?

- He stole that shirt.
- We won 6 and and lost 3. Made it to the playoffs and got crushed. It's always fun.
- Robotics isn't very well advertised in school.
- They'd show it off at a pep rally for five minutes but that was it.
- Pretty much the only people that join robotics are people who know people who are already in robotics.

Let's talk about soft skills. Do you know what I'm talking about? Manufacturers mention that it is sometimes difficult to motivate younger people on the job, or to even show up. Why is that?

- (At school) attendance is mandatory, so if you don't show up, you're going to fail.
- Yeah. We have to clock in.
- Biometric scanner.
- We have a hand scanner that we have to clock in with every day.
- It's supposed to simulate work. Obviously, I don't have a job, but if you miss one or two days unexcused, that's not going to fly, so they're trying to simulate that, in a sense.
- I also remember one of our instructors told us that they had some employers say that soft skills are one of the most important things they're looking for. Even above skill. If you're a good welder, okay. If you don't have soft skills, they don't really want you.
- Another thing is, after almost all of our semesters, we always get our

paper back of our logins and log outs, when we clock in and clock out. It will highlight every time that we are late, every time that we're gone. He'll ask us why.

- Another thing our instructor said too was, that after we graduate, if our employer decides to call them, they will tell them how many days we missed and the reasons, and if we are a good candidate for attendance and such.

Can you get bounced out of the program, by missing too much?

- No, but your grade will suffer, very much so because of it, and that could cause you to in turn, leave.
- Drop out.
- Only a handful, like two or three students from last semester. They didn't come back this semester. They push you pretty hard in the first semester, a lot of homework, and you'll see the people who don't like to do their homework, don't like to take in after school hours. They won't be here.
- You see people drop real quick.
- If you're not willing to work and put extra time into it, then you're not going to succeed through.
- When I was in high school or whatever, it was pretty much everybody had a job going through high school and it seems like now the kids don't really have jobs. We were in construction and manufacturing when we were in high school. I did on-the-job training, so I'd get out half a day every day and go to work.

We did the first focus group with parents. They said young people don't value work situations because they've never had a job. Is there value in having a job while you're growing up?

- Yeah. Well, you get experience and training and all. Maybe employers wanted to hear you have a schedule, like going in there every day, and you get money after a while, so it's nice.
- Dealing with stupid people is also a very valuable skill.

- That's always very fun.
- Change your whole outlook on fast food restaurants, pull up there and just deal with some interesting characters.

What advice would you give to manufacturers about how to deal with their younger employees?

- Keep a level eye with your employees.
- Be a little less condescending, keep a level eye with them. A little more understanding of how they're going through the work. Pay attention to how hard they're working and if they're not working hard enough, let them know. Instead of, "Hey, you need to work harder." Just be like, "Hey, You know what? You're lacking a little bit today. Would you mind picking up the pace a little bit?"
- I feel like that's kind of important. It's become a generational thing where, so many older adults just feel like, all kids are lazy. Yeah, there are some but not all of us are lazy.
- Just give them a chance, see if they're going to work and then deal accordingly. If they prove they're not going to work hard, then yeah, you have to do different things. Don't just expect them to be lazy and not do any work, unless you force them to.
- Well, all the jobs I've had, have been hands on like concrete construction, welding, and moving furniture. I've always put in 100 percent right away. They'd notice that I do hard work. I just know it's my job to get it done, so I need to do that.

What's your sense of job loyalty. Do you see yourself working somewhere for, say, 30 years?

- I don't agree with going job to job. I think you should try finding a career, stay in that career. I know a lot of people probably get bored with it. Our generation is used to new things all the time.
- Some people don't last days. They don't like it so they quit.
- I've seen that happen.
- I've seen it happen.

- I've seen it happen.
- I have, too.
- I work at COMPANY here in town and a guy started two weeks ago. He worked for three days. He came in at lunch time and said, "I quit. This is too much work for me." He worked for three days. I think at least you should put in a two-week notice or at least finish the week. It was a Wednesday, he left us hanging with a lot of projects to do. My boss said, "Are you going to finish the day?" He just left at lunch.
- I work at a lot of kitchens. I am a line cook at RESTAURANT and I'm also the kitchen manager at COMPANY. I've dealt with a lot of people that would rather complain about a large workload rather than do it. You get a lot of people that will quit and just not give any effort whatsoever.
- Irritating.
- They don't understand that it's not just their problem, it's everyone's problem.

Why do people behave like that?

- They're selfish, I think. They don't understand that it's not just you. It's everyone. In order for this to work, we all have to work together, and communication is key and just being on the same page. It's hard for a lot of people to do that, to just focus on the job at hand because there's a lot of stress going on, like a busy environment, a lot of yelling. That's where your soft skills come in hand, definitely.
- I feel like a lot of the whole work ethic and complaining about it being hard comes down to a bunch of kids that I know, who don't have to grow up. Their parents do everything for them. They've always been able to cry about it and then there's a little lifeline of, "Oh, my parents will solve all my problems for me." Rather than them having to do things themselves and having to learn.
- I mean, if you start at the home or you want to give people structure and put them on the right path, you still need to let them make their own decisions. If you do that growing up, then they'll still be able to apply that same concept in the work environment later in life. Especially with employers.

- If you don't give them enough structure, maybe they'll just be like, "I'm just going to go home."

Some young workers really don't like traditional work hours.

- Also, I noticed if they're not on a schedule, they don't want to come in and cover a shift. Like, "Oh, I'm not scheduled Saturday."
- "It's my day off, I don't want to come in."
- Even though they're not doing anything, they're like, "No, I don't think it's going to happen. I can't do it." If they don't know that they're working, they're not really motivated to pick up an extra shift here and there, I suppose, is where I was trying to go with that.

Smartphones bring another issue that some manufacturers have to deal with. Younger workers don't want to part with them. What would you tell them?

- You just have to know when it's appropriate. In the kitchen, if we're at rush time, you don't look at it, you don't touch it but if we're right before an opener or whatever, if we're prepping and you get a text or a call, yeah, you can obviously go check it or if you want to play some music on the speaker, go for it. When the time comes, you got to put it down. It's just all knowing what's appropriate and at what time.

How about at school? Are you allowed to have your phones with you?

- We can have them on us. They kind of frown upon us using them a lot but it's our choice to be there, we pay to go there, they don't tell us that we can't be on them. A lot of kids do go on them quite often.
- That's kind of what I said earlier about incentives. If you treat them terrible or not terrible, just not poorly, then obviously they're going to go find somewhere else to work. You got to treat them well, be on the same level, be on the same page.
- In our workplace, I'd say it's kind of safe to have your phone off. You're running saws and you're working with very hot stuff. If you're on your phone or you're using a grinder and you got headphones in and it gets wrapped up or your headphones get caught in the saw, that can hurt you. In our shop, there are no headphones. We have the music in the shop, off a

radio that we can hear.

- Actually, I think last year or a couple of years ago, they had a fire drill over at the college and a kid had his earphones in the booth and never left his welding booth. Somebody come through to check the shop and there he was, working away. Had his headphones in, didn't hear it. In that way, it can be very unsafe, I guess. Usually, they point us towards putting our phones in the toolboxes.
- When I'm at work, I don't touch my phone from 7:45 to 6:30, when I get off, with the exception of lunch.
- I work at CHILDCARE over the summer. We need to have our phones on us, in case an accident happens. In general, it's just an expectation that you're not going to be on your phone, especially because you're watching kids. I had a coworker, where we would take the kids up to go to the pool and she would just be sitting there on her phone the whole time, not even looking at the kids. I can't even try and count how many times I tried to tell her, "You can't do that. That is not safe." She just would never listen to me. I feel like again, it kind of goes back to the whole loyalty thing and people just don't care. To them it's just, "Oh, I can get another job." To me, it's like, you need to be loyal because you decided to make a commitment, so if you're not actually going to put in the work and the effort then do not look at your phone because your phone is not that important.
- There's nothing on there that won't be on there later. I feel like in so many ways, it's just some people are so obsessed with it and then other people understand that it's not the most important thing in the world. It's more important to be loyal to your job and do your work safely and not cause harm to you or anybody else.

Let's do something different. Let's go around the room. Tell me what you see yourself doing in 10 years.

- I've always wanted to be a teacher but then, my brother has been pushing me into engineering. I like the engineering side a lot. I don't like any sort of biology or anything like that, and I'm not going into the medical field. I like mechanical engineering and architecture and stuff like that. I like doing that.
- I'll probably still be in school for medicine but I don't know. I think that definitely welding could be something I can do on the side as a job, to help pay for school. I don't know. Just school and having some fun, at

least, with welding at home.

- I'm still unsure. Either engineering or something with interpreting. I want to do something that will help people, so I'm trying to decide what way will be best.
- Welding. I'm not sure exactly what kind of welding I want to do yet.
- I don't really know. I feel like if I enjoy going out on the line, that's probably where I'll stay but for the first couple of years, because you actually have to be a welder's helper. You can't go straight on the line and be a welder. You have to go on the 798 Welders Union, well that's a good union to be in, so that's a union that you want to start out in and depending on the line that you go into, you have to be in some sort of union. That's probably where I'll end up.
- I'm still kind of torn too. I was debating doing the underwater welding, going to the diving school here in town, getting my certificate. Or maybe some heavy industry stuff, like shipyards. I like to travel the sites and what not, I want to do some traveling, something like that. I don't really want to work on a line in an industry, pumping out the same line every day.
- In 10 years I hope to own my own fab shop.
- I have a few different ideas but pipeline is a big thing going on right now, so I want to get on that and hopefully within three to four years, I can become a certified professional pipe welder. Then, you get paid more if you have your own welding rig. In 10 years, I'd hope to have my own welding rig and be subcontracted to different places, so I can get paid. Traveling a lot of places. I'm actually looking at a pipe-lining company in Montana right now. You go on the internet, you browse through. You find what you like. I mean, there's a lot of places that you can go weld for.
- In 10 years, hopefully I'll be starting up my own robotics manufacturing business. I'm planning on starting at Delta Electronics. I have a couple of family friends that work there.
- I'm not entirely sure yet, but like I'd like to work at some sort of engineering firm in aerospace or power supports or agriculture or something like that.
- Overall, just the CDC. In 7th grade, we did a lot of stuff there. Big report on viruses. Saw a lot of videos, it looked really interesting. I really

like bio too.

How important is income to that decision?

- Depending on what type of rules they have there, what's the workplace environment like, co-workers is also a big thing. It just kind of comes down to, if you want them to behave like adults you treat them like adults, you can't give them nothing. "Just go do your job but you can't be too hands on. You eat now, this is what you go and do, this is when you do it. This is how you breathe correctly, this is what you do here."
- You can't do everything for them, but you can't do nothing for them. Sure, I would probably stay at a job that paid less, but if I liked the people I worked with and everyone was relaxed there, it would be fine.
- Give them structure but at the same time, let your workers have some decisions, on how they go about their job, as long as they get the job done.
- I'd say the work environment has a lot to do with it, whether it's clean, dirty, the style of work that you're doing, safe. I know if I was working over at Brian's and I didn't get paid what I got paid now, I probably wouldn't work there because it's dirty and it's hard work.