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MISSED OPPORTUNITY

Among the biggest challenges facing the industry today is the lack of qualified personnel. From operators to packagers, the sentiment is consistent, “we can’t find enough people with the necessary skill sets to do the job.”

Granted, the balance between those exiting the industry for retirement compared to those entering the industry as new hires is drastically skewed. Colleges and technical schools that offer programs tailored toward gas compression share the same problem – lack of students. But, the gap between veteran employees leaving and new talent entering the gas compression workforce is only part of the problem. Budget cuts and downsizing have forced companies of all sizes to do more with less, leaving workers to perform additional duties that often fall outside of their experience and expertise, often without additional training to properly understand the role.

The spring tradeshow season has come to an end. Conferences like the Eastern Gas Compression Roundtable (Pittsburgh), the Offshore Technology Conference (Houston), the Gulf South Rotating Machinery Symposium (Baton Rouge), the Gas Processors Midstream Association (rotating locations), and the Gas Compressor Association (Galveston) have all seen their numbers decline. Despite the drop off in attendance, each still offers a strong lineup of learning opportunities that are being ignored by an industry in which the biggest problem is lack of trained personnel.

In talking to industry players large and small, one popular sentiment is, “we just can’t afford to have people away for two or three days attending a conference anymore. Times have changed.” I agree 100% — times have changed. But, what has not changed is the need for properly trained employees. Technical conferences remain a viable training tool when used properly. The depth of knowledge and the amount of expertise and experience that gathers under one roof is unmatched by any other opportunity.

Another concern I hear often: “How do I know they will actually attend these sessions and not just hang out by the pool for three days?” The solution is simple: ask them; hold them accountable. The right professional sees the opportunity and understands the knowledge that will be gained by attending a technical conference and will make the most out of the experience — regardless of how tempting the pool might be. And let’s be honest, you know who the right professionals on your team are. You know who you can trust to maximize these learning opportunities and who you can’t. Reward that trust. Take advantage of these continued learning opportunities.

Before eliminating technical conference attendance from your scheduling and yearly budget, consider the cost of not investing in your employees’ continued learning. There’s a global lineup of summer and fall technical conferences. It’s not too late to rediscover the unmatched learning opportunities these meetings offer. 