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**How Important Is Occupational Skills Training?**

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A new report by the Aspen Institute concludes that specialized training that coincides with the needs, economic cycles, and demands of a particular industry can boost low-wage workers' salaries significantly and increase job security.

“The current labor market is complex and contradictory,” writes Maureen Conway, coauthor of the study. “In the midst of rising unemployment rates, employers in critical industries such as healthcare, manufacturing, and the building trades continue to struggle to recruit and retain workers with sound basic and technical skills.

“In recent years,” she continued, “changes in technology and in the general business environment have compelled many companies to increase their investment in training in order to remain competitive. At the same time, investments in training by the public sector have diminished. The end result is that workers who are the least likely to receive employer provided training — entry-level workers with low earnings and limited work experience and education — also are increasingly less likely to have access to publicly funded training that can build skills, improve employment prospects, and boost earning power.”

The answer, according to Conway and coauthor Ida Rademacher, are special training programs that are targeted to the needs of specific industries. According to the study, the median personal earnings of program participants rose from \$4,144 to \$13,650 in the year following training, to \$16,894 the second year after training due to an average 31 percent increase in wage rates as well as work hours.

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