



Ensuring Continuity and Quality in an Aging Field Service Workforce

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Since 2001 Source has developed and managed its own global variable workforce, [Source Techworks](#). Today, its 12,000+ members span more than 110 countries.

Many recent field engineer surveys have produced a common finding: the workforce is trending older and more experienced. According to a survey we published in 2020, 89 percent of the FEs in our Source Techworks network have been freelance FEs for at least six years and 48 percent of them have more than 15 years of experience as an FE. A [2019 survey from The Service Council](#) found that 46% of all field service employees in North America are age 50 or older, and that percentage is even higher (a full 50%) in EMEA.

The field service workforce also has been directly impacted by larger societal and economic trends since the COVID-19 pandemic began. [According to the Schwartz Center](#), in a report published in February:

- Nearly two million older workers have left the workforce for good since the start of the pandemic.
- The total number of workers ages 55+ has dropped by about five percent, compared to a drop in the total number of workers ages 35-54 of less than two percent.
- Three million more older workers would be working now if the pandemic didn't happen.

As they should be, organizations are increasingly concerned about the knowledge and expertise, work ethic and customer connections and relationships they'll lose when these workers leave. Quite simply, workers are leaving jobs and retiring in higher numbers than they did one or two years ago, and those who are eligible and able to work are being more deliberate about accepting their next positions and furthering their career paths. And that's if they do so at all; 60% of those surveyed by the [Technology & Services Industry Association \(TSIA\)](#) in 2019 said that field service may or may not be their long-term career, with 27% saying no and 33% saying they weren't sure.



How to Attract and Develop the Next Generation of Field Engineers

Field service organizations, if they haven't already, need to have a plan for ensuring their workforce can handle demand and deliver timely, quality assistance over the long term. Clearly, an essential component of this needs to be the recruitment and development of a new generation of field engineers.

To do this, in addition to traditional HR considerations like competitive compensation/benefits, proper onboarding and performance reviews, organizations should focus on a few particular areas:

- Meet employees where they are. A flexible, variable organizational structure may allow workers of all ages to enjoy the work-life balance they desire, or work where/when they want. For example, our Source Techworks program has many FEs who are technically retired but still want to stay active on a schedule that best fits their needs. These kinds of programs can help you retain the wealth of experience and skill that older FEs bring with them, as well as improve happiness and job satisfaction for workers of all ages.
- Explore and integrate technology. Of course, workers need to be as connected to their home offices and their parts as possible. The above TSIA survey showed that mobile devices are used by almost all FEs today, and more FEs use smartphones and tablets for everyday work than laptops, so obviously organizational systems must integrate with newer technologies and be easy to use on them. But beyond that, what technologies can provide new and perhaps more efficient service experiences? Predictive analytics, machine learning, the Internet of Things and augmented reality are just a few of the frontiers that service organizations should explore, to see if they hold value.
- Introduce and/or expand mentorship arrangements. This is essential for two reasons: to facilitate continuity by passing as much institutional knowledge to mentees as possible, and to create interpersonal relationships that have all sorts of intrinsic benefits on and off the clock.
- Re-think training programs. More than one-third of the respondents in the TSIA survey said they are extremely or somewhat dissatisfied with the learning opportunities, training and guidance available to them. As a result, learning programs have to be comprehensive and engaging enough to cover situations FEs will face on the job without being overloaded with unnecessary or untimely information. There's nothing more frustrating for end-users or FEs than being on-site and not knowing how to do a job properly.
- Recruit outside the box. FEs today are coming from more walks of life than ever before – the military, the sciences and more. While having good relationships with trade schools is important, smart managers are finding new best practices and infusing new energy into their organizations by expanding their target pools and integrating new soft skills and perspectives.
- Make service engagements more efficient. Minimize the amount of time FEs spend traveling and finding parts, and maximize the time they spend on-site getting the job done. Outsourcing might help as well; an efficient, experienced third-party service firm can be assigned routine break-fix or other needs so FEs can focus on specific or higher-value tasks that may carry more value for them and your organization.



The axiom is true: any company's most important asset is its people. Because of that, organizations have a lot of work to do to counteract current trends and ensure they will have what it takes to succeed for years to come. The ones that solve this puzzle and build the strongest, most productive teams are highly likely to develop a significant competitive advantage.

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