

Bill Swan

Training & Development Specialist

Swagelok

If you ask Bill Swan how he got into manufacturing, he would say that he stumbled into it. In the late 1980s, he had a successful plumbing business and got numerous new home construction contracts. Then almost overnight, it all fell apart.

“The Gulf War hit, and new home construction went very low,” recalled Swan. “I had four kids at home, and I needed a job. So in between what little plumbing contracts I did have, I supplemented that with some part-time work.”

It was a difficult decision for Swan, who until that point only wanted to grow his plumbing business into the best service provider of the kind in his community. He loved helping customers pick out plumbing fixtures, and working on new home construction projects that last a lifetime. Nevertheless, at that moment, he found himself turning away from his personal vision for his family’s sake.

“I went to a temp employment agency, and they sent me to Swagelok. I filled out a resume and was hired,” said Swan. Two weeks into his new part-time job, he came to a surprising realization that he loved it. “I’m not going anywhere,” Swan said to himself at the time. “I gave up on my plumbing business.”

Why did a man with an entrepreneurial vision of his own, put that vision aside for a manufacturing job where he had no experience?

“I loved Swagelok’s culture, values, respect for teamwork, innovation, and desire to serve their customers, without fail,” explained Swan. “So when

I started adding up all these elements, I felt like if I was to build my ideal business, it would be this.”

Three decades later, Swan is Swagelok’s Training & Development Specialist.

Things fell in place for him at the right time, with the right company. When he looks back on how he got to where he is now, it all seems like it was meant to be. “I think what happened to me was fate, where I landed into a job where the culture, the competitive nature of being number one, and just helping their customer win was a personality connection for me,” explained Swan. “I had no real desire to run a machine, but I loved the culture. It’s been a blessing for me and it landed in my path.” He loves his job so much that it does not feel like work.

Now, Swan helps young people purposefully pursue manufacturing, and not find it by accident as he did. He encourages them to find a company with a culture and career paths that line up with their personality, and not just a job or individual task. For him, focusing on career pathways stimulates the mind to look beyond a paycheck and towards overall values. When the values of a company match those of the employee, that is where true love for the work lies, according to Swan.

He provides industry presentations to high school and college-level students, sharing Swagelok’s culture to



the young generation, but he'd like to reach kids at the middle school level. "Initially, I spoke with and recruited high school students that weren't planning on going to college, and if they were going to college, did not want to leave home so they chose a community college." He noticed that many were joining manufacturing simply to be employed without any understanding of what career pathways they could take. "To help steer the right-minded students, we want them to get some information at their disposal before they reach high school," explained Swan. "We want to fill the manufacturing pipeline with the right students, so we're not wasting their time, as they embark on their career or enter programs like MAGNET. This serves the broader manufacturing community."

Other than MAGNET, Swagelok is involved with eight other Early College Early Career (ECEC) programs in the Cleveland area, but Swan does not care which path students take as long as it is the best path for them. When they hire someone out of an ECEC program, Swan noticed that the retention rate after one year was significantly higher. ECEC programs give Swagelok recruits who are looking for a career, which helps them stay with the company much longer.

"It's been a humbling prospect that Swagelok created a position that provides the opportunity to help young adults with making informed career decisions," Swan said. "I help to point them in a direction that can lead them to a life-changing career opportunity. I see young people, coming out of these programs, getting job offers where they have the opportunity to build a rewarding career. It's gratifying to see."