

Dee Dee Jones

Industry Coordinator

Manufacturing Renaissance

Spend five minutes with native Chicagoan DeeDee Jones and you'll notice her love for connecting people to opportunities in manufacturing. As Manufacturing Renaissance's Industry Coordinator, she's effective at building relationships with both trainees and companies.

When she was a business major at Lewis University, she worked many menial jobs. Wanting stability, she turned to manufacturing.

"I would go to school during the day as a full-time college student, and in the evenings I would go to work in manufacturing. Once I started, I fell in love with it," recalled Jones. Working full-time gave her the financial support that she needed to put herself through college. "In that job, I learned the struggles, as an employee and as an employer." Her experiences in manufacturing made her yearn to become a decision maker in the industry. That's how she found her passion in human resources.

Jones encourages youth to enter manufacturing by showing them examples of young people just like them with successful careers. She emphasizes salaries, reveals the pathways from entry level to management, and underscores the mobility they get from learning portable skills. For those who are less enticed by the potential for employment, she gets their attention by appealing to their entrepreneurial desire.

"You can start off in the company, learn some technologies, some processes and you can do this yourself," said Jones. "If you think it, you can build it, sell it and if it becomes profitable, you can become a manufacturer." Jones shows prospective trainees the link between their hobbies and manufacturing. "I don't sell

manufacturing as the end all and be all," she said. "Use it to get to where you want to go. If it becomes a career, great. If it doesn't, it was an opportunity."

Before trainees leave the program with the hard skills they need to get a job, Jones holds three-hour one-on-one discussions with them to ensure that they have the soft skills to match. Regardless of their level of ambition, she takes specific actions. "I will take that ambitious person and put them in a company that will nurture that," said Jones. When trainees need more motivation, Jones helps them by teaching the company how to understand their personality and what drives them. She considers educating companies this way as her "sweet spot."

Jones is able to give actionable advice because she knows the companies well. "Matching a company's environment to a person's wants, needs, and personality type is key," she explained. According to Jones, building relationships with the trainees and with companies is very easy. It all comes down to three things: "Developing trust, confidence, and communication."

By doing the work, Jones helps trainees find the right company, shift, and position. She leaves very little to chance. "You could be at a great company, but in the wrong position," she said. "I communicate with them



their first day, week, month until they are 100 percent independent.”

Companies love Jones because when it comes to preparing trainees for the job they are about to take, she’s thorough, meticulous, and cares deeply about their success. “If I don’t have anybody, I’m going to tell them I don’t have anybody,” Jones explained. “That’s why I’ve kept relationships for 10-15 years with these employers.” This patience is what keeps employers coming back for more. “I’m not trying to push people. I’m trying to make connections,” she said. “I don’t throw spaghetti on the wall and hope that it sticks. I think that’s what employers appreciate about me. I’m not just in it for me.”