

Julia Culkin-Jacobia

Vice President of Human Resources

PCB Piezotronics

Julia Culkin's connection to Northland Workforce Training Center (NWTC) is a story of chance and fortune. As Vice President of Human Resources for PCP Piezotronics, she looked for talent all over Buffalo. She found kids right out of high school and some from the streets, but it was hard finding qualified recruits on a consistent basis. As pipeline after pipeline that she was aware of shutdown, she kept searching until one day, she happened upon NWTC.

"A friend of mine who knew that I was looking for machinists told me about Northland. When I went there, I liked every one of their students," she recalled. She was so impressed with what NWTC had to offer that she took photos of their advanced equipment to compare it with what PCP Piezotronics had. It took a little convincing, but the company started to see the promise in NWTC that she saw.

"Northland invited us to have some of our manufacturing managers come down and see their facility. I think that was the kicker — our managers came down to see them and were impressed," described Culkin. That's how she convinced the company to become an industry partner. The excitement of finding NWTC reminds her of why she got into human resources in the first place.

"The more I learned about business, the more I felt like people are the core," she explained. "If you don't have great people, if your people aren't happy, if they're not motivated and driven, then your business is not going to be successful." As an HR professional who is fascinated by organizational behavior, Culkin is on the executive committee at PCP Piezotronics. Whenever sales,

operations, or engineering is discussed, she's mindful of the human impact of their decisions.

Other than being an industry partner, she is fortunate to view NWTC from the perspective of a parent. Her son is a student there, but like PCP Piezotronics, it took a while for her to convince him too. "When my son graduated high school, he really did not know what he wanted to do in life. He didn't want to learn a trade, but I brought him to Northland. The career counselors gave him a tour, and they talked about all the programs. And he just had this passion that developed and now he just loves it." With both the company that she works for and her son seeing NWTC the way she does, Culkin has become a fierce advocate of the program.

One challenge NWTC faces is getting their students to where the jobs are. The program produces great talent, but distance is an issue (an issue many companies face since they are not always located close to where current and potential employees live). Culkin admits that if transportation wasn't such an issue, that she would hire more graduates of the program. "A lot of companies don't know about Northland," she said. "Identifying those companies in the same areas and asking them if they would like graduates with the skills that they're looking for would help." Culkin would like to



see companies in the area get a private bus to shuttle students from NWTC to a central point where they can make it to work and back.

“When we started hiring, people were declining job offers. They wanted the job, but they didn’t have transportation,” Culkin explained. “Then it got me thinking maybe we should really figure that out. I feel like it’s something we can do to support the program and the people it serves.”