

# Developing Skilled Tradesmen and a Stronger Workforce Through Mentorship

At 18, Robert VanRiper walked into ESCO and applied for a position at the company's foundry. Within days, Robert found himself working his first graveyard shift, flogging large components used in construction markets. It was a new industry and new trade for Robert. At the time, well-worn safety gear had years more experience than the young high school graduate could imagine.

Now 23 years in, Robert is the manufacturing manager for the Portland foundry, operated by ESCO, a division of Weir.

Robert's career progression — from unskilled high school graduate to team leader to his current role overseeing the local foundry's manufacturing operations — is not unlike that of other tradesmen who learned their skills on the job. The trades are a worthy opportunity for workers to explore new skills, make a great, living-wage salary, and pursue viable, long-term career paths.

Weir takes career development a step further by providing resources like tuition reimbursement, and skills and process management training for rising manufacturing leaders, with opportunities to tackle challenging proj-



Robert  
VanRiper

ects. Robert jumped on the many opportunities and resources available to him at Weir. Case in point: Robert traveled to Xuzhou, China, to help build a greenfield operation.

The real perk, Robert says? Developing the next generation of tradesmen. Robert brings a mentorship mentality to the shop floor -- supporting a steady narrative the company has maintained for decades. Many of Robert's growth opportunities at Weir stem from strong mentorship and employee support. The coaching came from colleagues with 30 or 40 years of experience in the trades.

"There's a reason why people stay here for decades. You have all the great mentors who you've worked with over the years who remember you and the details about your family, you can see that they really cared," said Robert. "They always made (ESCO) a company I wanted to work for because I wasn't a number here."

With an eye for developing his workforce, Robert has created a training and development matrix for his team leaders. The objective is to pave a clear path for those aiming to develop certain competencies to advance to the next level of leadership.

"You can make a career here," said Robert of the opportunities that exist both on the floor and within other departments at Weir. "Whether you're working in the shop your entire career, making a great wage right out of school, or if you wanted to take your career a step further like I did, ESCO loves to build from within. There's opportunity here that will allow you to grow."

The people, Robert said, are core to the success of the company, his team and his own professional development. As a mentor and leader, Robert builds confidence in the skilled workers who are homegrown within the foundry, while attracting a new generation of tradesmen in the workforce.

- By ESCO, a Weir Group Division