

# Three ways to champion skilled trade pathways for our youth

By Penny Wise, President, 3M Canada

Transformative, unstoppable global forces like demographic shifts, climate change, and the digital revolution are shaping the world around us – with far-reaching impacts on our society.

While each of these global forces are disruptive, demographic shifts are directly impacting our skilled trades workforce and our future economy. In Canada, more than [700,000](#) skilled trade workers are expected to retire by 2028, and this is creating demand for a new generation of workers.

In fact, the 3M State of Science Index (SOSI) highlights that 96 per cent of Canadians believe that our workforce needs more skilled trades, and many Canadians see consequences if the country cannot find a solution to the shortage – from negative economic impact to supply chain challenges.

The challenge of modern demographic and social change isn't a single disruption – it's multiple, intersecting disruptions. If we understand why this is happening, we can help improve daily life and work, enabling people to craft the experiences they want, live out their values and focus on higher-level, rewarding skilled trade jobs, with a positive impact to our society.

So how do we get there? I believe the solution lies in championing and inspiring our youth to seek fulfilling skilled trades and STEM pathways.

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## Championing skilled trades.



As the leader of a global science company in Canada, I have had the privilege of working with many champions throughout my career and being a champion to many other incredible leaders across the network.

I would like to share a few of these stories here in the hope that it will help inspire others that are on a similar journey.

Andrea Martin is a fall protection sales specialist with 3M who has worked in the safety industry for over 18 years. When she started looking at a career in fall protection, Andrea didn't have a lot of female role models: *"I had amazing male mentors and sidekicks, but there were not a lot of women in the safety and fall protection space,"* she

said.

Andrea however hopes to highlight that skilled trade is a viable and much-needed career path. *"The more that we open our eyes, take away these blinders about these jobs, the more we'll understand that those skilled trades are what makes the world go round -- they build your house, your office space, our roads,"* Andrea said.

Today, she is a champion for women looking to make a career in the industrial and safety field. She believes that representation in the industry is important to show others what opportunities are available.



Terry Bowman is a manufacturing and supply chain leader, and plant director at the 3M London, Ontario manufacturing plant in Canada. Terry has been at 3M for almost 32 years, working in several countries, head office and multiple manufacturing locations.

Reflecting on his profession, Terry believes that more needs to be done to highlight the varied opportunities that a skilled trade pathway presents: *"There's more to skilled trades than what we see on the surface. If people were able to see some of the more higher end type of skilled trade roles that exist, the different types of work that is available and how lucrative it can be, they would think differently about a career in skilled trades."*

Terry is committed to showcasing the career opportunities to youth through inviting high school students who are curious about skilled trades to visit the 3M plant where they can meet the engineering and manufacturing teams and learn about their careers firsthand to help make more informed decisions. *"Everyone has a role to play to boost the profile of skilled trade careers. As employers, we have a responsibility to highlight the many pathways available, and through partnerships with schools we can help make them aware of the changing skills needed within the manufacturing environment to equip our youth for the workplace."*

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### Three ways to champion skilled trade pathways.

Given the demographic shifts, it's time for businesses to showcase the fulfilling and exciting career pathways and experiences in skilled trades and STEM for all Canadians.

The results of the SOSI research indicate that 55 per cent of Canadians believe **the negative stigma around skilled workers still exists** – even in 2023. Additionally, 89 per cent of Canadians believe that if the image of skilled trade careers improved, more people would choose to go into the skilled trades. This makes it critically more important for businesses to intervene and help improve the perception around skilled trades.

Here are three ways that businesses can champion skilled trades and STEM pathways:

#### **1. Encourage youth at an early age by showcasing the variety of career options in skilled trades.**

Curiosity for skilled trades starts at a young age.

As corporate leaders, we have the influence to create future opportunities for newer generations through partnerships, apprenticeships, and scholarships for those who want to pursue skilled trades and STEM learning experiences.

At [3M Canada](#), we have a long history of being mentors and volunteers for local community-based initiatives, such as [First Robotics](#), [Skills Ontario](#), and the [London Children's Museum](#), and have a passion for inspiring scientific acumen in our youth. 3M's *Mind Over Metal* program also collaborated with the Canadian Welding Bureau (CWB) Welding Foundation to host a skilled trades camp for elementary and high school students.

## **2. Improve barriers to access for underrepresented communities to enter skilled trades.**

Underrepresented communities including minorities, 2SLGBTQI+, people with disabilities, women, low-income or those who live in rural areas often face barriers when entering the skilled trades and the STEM workforce. According to the SOSI research, 89 per cent of Canadians believe it is important to increase DE&I in skilled trade fields, and 75 per cent of Canadians believe underrepresented communities often do not receive equal access to STEM education.

To help advance social and economic equity, [3M Canada is committed to delivering more than 300,000 STEM and skilled trades learning experiences](#) to underrepresented individuals by 2025. This is part of 3M's global commitment to create five million STEM and skilled trades learning experiences for underrepresented individuals by the end of 2025. These experiences will offer scholarships, internships, and student services for STEM majors, while providing experiential learning opportunities.

In Canada, this includes partnerships with the Canadian Association for Girls in Science (CAGIS) through the 3M STEM Advocacy Fund that aims to provide support to organizations and people who are uniquely positioned to support the removal of hidden barriers and to improve representation in STEM.

## **3. Showcase and highlight diverse role models within the skilled trades sector.**

The SOSI data showcases that 96 per cent of Canadians believe that encouraging role models to champion STEM careers is an effective action in encouraging young people to pursue the STEM pathway. The research also indicates that Canadians believe spotlighting stories of real people who have successful skilled trade careers will help improve perceptions about entering the sector.

When [Andrea Martin](#) started navigating a career in fall protection, she did not have a lot of female role models. Decades later, her passion and role as a valued female within the skilled trades has encouraged many women to enter the field as well.

By highlighting role models, we continue to encourage an open and positive dialogue in the sector, championing those who want to pursue a career in skilled trades and STEM. Demonstrating how a skilled trade job can offer a jumping off point to many other career options will also help showcase how exciting and lucrative a career in skilled trades can be.

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We know that science and society evolve together, and for businesses it's critically more important than ever to move forward through the demographic shifts, define what's next and deliver solutions that will help improve lives.

I believe we are on the right path, and I look forward to continuing to champion our youth and unlocking the potential of what we can accomplish together.

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<https://news.3mcanada.ca/Three-ways-to-champion-skilled-trade-pathways-for-our-youth>