



Tapping into "Hidden Workers"

A Toyotetsu Case Study

Case Study developed by greater:SATX with grant support from the Kronkosky Foundation.

Overview

[Toyotetsu Texas](#) (TTTX) is a Japanese-American automotive parts manufacturing company that has operated from its facility in San Antonio, TX since 2006. As a Tier 1 supplier for Toyota, TTTX primarily makes parts for the Toyota Tundra and Toyota Sequoia. As a manufacturing leader in the San Antonio, Texas region (SATX), Toyotetsu Texas, Inc. built a culture of individual growth, development, and inclusivity.

The following case study details TTTX's experience developing a focused hiring plan to tap into "hidden workers" and employ more individuals with disabilities.

The Challenge

With many team members hired with little to no direct experience in manufacturing, Toyotetsu often identifies and hires those with related workplace aptitude and invests in their future through extensive on-the-job training, mentorships, and career pathway mapping. These internal processes and focus developed into a best practice model that reduces turnover and retention issues and positions the Toyotetsu culture as a model for similar industry employers in the San Antonio region.

And while Toyotetsu has experienced success in this model and growth in operations and staff, there was still an identified gap in the quantity of candidates needed to fill open roles.

Toyotetsu identified this challenge and need to source talent differently.

The Solution

In recent years, Toyotetsu began exploring "hidden workforce populations" to help fill the hiring needs. Hidden workforces, as defined by research from the [Harvard School of Business](#), are qualified candidates that are systematically excluded or "hidden" with technologically advanced hiring processes that are designed to find the "perfect" candidate. Encompassing various non-traditional candidate populations, a focused effort on programs and initiatives for hidden workers recently created new opportunities for justice involved individuals, women returning to the workforce, veterans transitioning to civilian roles, and under-educated job seekers. While employers hiring from these and many other hidden workforce populations are achieving hiring success, Toyotetsu identified an additional opportunity to create an intentional program to provide career opportunities for individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDDs).

Approached in 2021 by the Alamo Area Council of Governments (AACOG) to partner, Toyotetsu and AACOG received a grant to provide work experience to individuals with IDD. In addition to Toyotetsu and AACOG, Workforce Solutions Alamo (WSA) and the Texas Workforce Solutions Vocational Rehabilitation Services (TWC-VRS) provided support in the success of the internship program development. This led the partnership to create a

customized manufacturing internship for area job seeking candidates that had an identified disability.

Toyotetsu leaders were not aware of best practices for hiring individuals with IDD, but sought out the right partners to assist operations and identification of supplemental funding and services. Unfortunately, there were no comparable industry partner mentors to learn directly from in the region, but the experienced Business Relations Coordinators at TWC-VRS provided the general framework for identifying roles, onboarding processes, and continued service needs through and beyond hiring.

The partners quickly determined that mapping out the potential candidates' full career journey was more important than immediately hiring the first cohort. Many of the candidates would need case management, full career exploration assistance, workforce readiness training, and other support funding to reduce employment barriers (e.g. transportation and housing).

“Luke came to us a support role, little did he know he'd leave as a vital part of our team! His attention to detail and concentration makes him capable of anything.”

*- TTTX Welding
Manager*

The partners designed a manufacturing internship program that included:

- > Identification of Job Coaches to support the interns with training and work-life balance activities. This would include weekly check-ins and evaluations in partnership with the production floor manager.
- > 73 hours of Vocational Adjustment Training (VAT) prior to the internship – TWC-VRS initially provided a list a classes offered and Toyotetsu validated and selected the skills-based learning necessary to prepare the candidates for internships.
 - o Courses included soft skills for work success, entering the world of work, disability discourse training, and money smart.
- > Aptitude testing and review with candidates to determine specific production department placement. Once identified, additional safety, quality control, and productivity training was provided.
- > 360 work hour internship program, with a scheduled ramp up from part-time to full-time. Challenges managed during this process included adjustment to shift rotations which can cause transportation and sleep schedule changes.
- > Review and evaluation of internship program success with job offers made to candidates that met the safety, quality, and productivity expectations.

Toyotetsu found added value in placing participants in existing roles, with modifications when needed. This provides consistent expectations of the production floor no matter the employee, but also provided intentional inclusivity for the participants. From the beginning, it was important to Toyotetsu leadership that the participants be treated similar to and held to the same standards as fellow team members. This enhanced the culture of

“Respect in the Workplace” and “The Toyotetsu Mind” through teamwork, partnership, mentorship across all staffing levels.

With an emphasis on a quality pilot program, the first cohort started with 6 intern participants in October 2022 and graduated 4 in January 2023, and offered employment to 2 individuals. A second cohort started with 6 intern participants in June 2023, graduated 3, and offered employment to all 3 candidates.

Identified Advice and Best Practices

Toyotetsu advises other employers to consider some of the following best practices:

- > We recommend bringing the right partners to the table to provide a holistic approach with wrap-around services. This includes local workforce boards, state agencies, and other social service providers.
- > Find the right Employer Services Partner (ESP) that shares the same program philosophy as your company. It's important that your job coaches believe in your program model and provide timely and relevant feedback so customized adjustments can be made.
- > Developing a well thought out program does not mean creating a “perfect” program before roll out. The “Plan Do Check Act” (PDCA) method will provide opportunities for constant program evaluation and improvement.
- > We learned that it is important to involve parents/guardians from the beginning to develop buy-in and confidence that their adult child's involvement with our internship would be a positive experience. If the parent/guardian supports the program they will be willing to do what it takes to ensure their child successfully completes the program and works towards gainful employment and, potentially, independent living.
- > Plant tours and a hands-on simulation activity are extremely helpful in the recruitment phase to determine motivational fit, functional capacity, and capability. It also provides an early opportunity to identify needed accommodation and support.
- > Integrating interns with other employees (work areas, break areas, etc.) was important. Not only was it a valuable experience for interns, but it was also a great experience for employees.

“Jaleel is one of the hardest working and willing to learn interns I've had the privilege of working with. He was ready to take on any task and always had a happy attitude.”

- TTTX Conveyance Manager

What's Next?

Toyotetsu plans to host 3-4 internship cohorts of 6 participants each year. Continuous improvement of the program is always a priority, including evolving the internship experience and the support provided following hiring.

To learn more about this program visit toyotetsurecruitment.com/ttx or contact Toyotetsu via email at ttx-jobs@ttna.com.



TTX interns pose in front of the San Antonio facility.

"The best part of my internship was learning how to weld the parts together and be a good team member."

- Blair B., TTX Intern



greatersatx.com | info@greatersatx.com