

High-Tech Seeks Skilled Tradesmen

di Dina Powell McCormick e Mike Rowe

Americans have been told a fable about our economic future. Construction and manufacturing were giving way to a digital economy based on knowledge alone. Skilled labor was outdated. Shop class was defunded. Four-year degrees were idolized. Blue-collar job losses and brittle supply chains were the price of progress.

This myth assumed that high-tech and the trades were alternatives, even rivals. In fact, they are interdependent. For 250 years, America has claimed the lion's share of the world's greatest inventions. But it was generations of American workers who strung the telegraph wire, laid the railroad tracks, and built the interstate highways and buried the fiber. They shared in the prosperity that resulted.

The artificial-intelligence revolution shows that America's technological progress and skilled workforce are still inseparable. To maintain our technological edge, we need to build infrastructure at scale and with great speed. This requires better pathways into high-paying trades for Americans hungry for opportunity.

The skilled trades and Silicon Valley need each other—and America's future needs them both.

That's why Meta and our partners, including the Associated Builders and Contractors and the National Urban League, are announcing the launch of America's Workforce Academy, the largest private-sector commitment to the skilled trades in American history, beginning with a \$115 million commitment in the first year and committing hundreds of millions over time.

AWA will reject the failed approach that asks workers to pay for their own training and hope to be rewarded with a job. The men and women who enroll will be paid for their time. Parents won't be blocked from learning tomorrow's skills because they need to put food on the table today. Courses will take weeks and leave graduates with

industry-standard certifications in high-demand fields such as electrical work, mechanical systems and plumbing. Every graduate will be guaranteed a job on a Meta partner's construction site. AWA, we believe, is the start of a revolution our economy needs.

Practically every major industry is desperate to hire more skilled workers. The mikeroweWORKS Foundation has spent years sounding this alarm. At Meta alone, we anticipate needing thousands more workers as we build infrastructure to empower students, families and small-business owners.

There is no lack of Americans eager to learn and work. Earlier this year, Meta launched LevelUp, a smaller training program focused on fiber installation. In the first seven days, we received more than 35,000 applications for 1,000 openings. Demand isn't the problem. What has been missing is a practical bridge linking America's workers to America's needs. AWA will be that pathway.

Skilled workers electrified rural America one pole at a time. They manned the factories that built the arsenal that won World War II. Now a new generation will pour the foundations and lay the fiber that secures American economic strength for a new age. The AI revolution is bringing change and uncertainty, but also historic opportunities. Americans don't flinch from challenges. When opportunity shows up as a hard hat or a pair of overalls, we put them on and get to work. That's always been our story. AWA will help us write the next chapter—one where the future is for everyone.

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