

Cleaning Up Misconceptions in Job Titles

Eliminate your industrial maintenance team in one easy step.



MATTHEW KIRCHNER
Managing Director, Profit360
mkirchner@profit-360.com

What does an individual who holds the title of “industrial maintenance” do for a living?

“I see it as a fancy title for a janitor in charge of a building, like sanitation control,” says Daniel, a high school sophomore, who in the coming year or so will be putting much thought into what he wants to do after high school. Think industrial maintenance will be on the list?

Having just completed the eighth grade, Sadie has a little more time to decide on her career path. Not completely confident in her answer, she responds. “A janitor type person? I have no clue.” Safe to say a career in industrial maintenance might not be near the top of Sadie’s list either.

Daniel and Sadie are just people I made up for the purpose of proving some point, right? Wrong. They really exist, as do the other eight teens we interviewed for the purpose of this column.

While some got a little nearer than others to the typical responsibilities of an employee who works in industrial maintenance, none of them were particularly close.

I interject at this point that we should all be thankful for janitors, custodians or for that matter the “sanitation control engineers” who keep our buildings clean and safe, and our properties well maintained. If that’s your job, I mean you exactly zero disrespect. However, for the purposes of

job opportunities awaiting their graduates. Job opportunities that didn’t take four to five years and tens of thousands of dollars of student loan debt to obtain.

Hmm, a two-year educational program to prepare students for jobs they perceive as janitorial in nature struggling to find students to enroll.

What could possibly be the problem? The answer is in part obvious: Change the perception. But how?

I sat in on a meeting recently that aimed to tackle the problem. Numerous well-intended suggestions were volleyed about. Have students shadow industrial maintenance people during a day of work. Show students that industrial maintenance people work with cutting edge manufacturing technology, like robotics, industrial automation, programmable logic controllers, relay controls, energy and so on.

Demonstrate to young people that people in industrial maintenance are often at the top of the industrial workforce pay scale, and that their skills and abilities are highly valued by employers. Help students understand that industrial maintenance people have a high level of skill in technology, and that the most valuable ones possess keen troubleshooting skills as well.

Show them that industrial maintenance people often have significant amounts of independence in the way they execute their responsibilities and—in part because of their unique level of knowledge that only they have—they typically don’t have a boss or supervisor breathing down their neck. The discussion continued.

Finally, the facilitator tied it all together: “That’s right, if we do these things then students will begin to understand that industrial maintenance people don’t just come to work and clean the urinals in the men’s bathrooms.” Most in the room nodded their heads.

“I have a better idea,” one attendee said. “What if we start by changing the title?” The room fell silent and the attendee continued.

“If the words ‘industrial maintenance’ conjure up visions of cleaning toilets, sweeping hallways and mopping office lobbies, then why fight it? Let’s find another title that better

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the point herein, I’ll make the assumption that most young people aspire for jobs of another sort. You are welcome to disagree, but please spare my inbox the emails espousing the difference in opinion. When asked about the health of their programs, most technical and community college industrial maintenance instructors share common insights. Generally their students have little trouble at all finding employment, and many have multiple job offers waiting for them upon graduation. If they graduate at all; many technical schools lament that students “job out,” meaning they secure meaningful employment with eager employers prior to completing their coursework, and leave their colleges prior to earning their degrees.

In addition to students jobbing out, the instructors in these programs have another challenge: Just about every one of them struggles with enrollment; that is finding enough interested students to fill the open spots in their programs. This in spite of the host of relatively high-paying, family-supporting

articulates the responsibilities of the position.”

So began my crusade to eliminate the phrase “industrial maintenance” from every job description, employee roster and help wanted ad in the U.S.

If your company’s position titles include industrial maintenance, eliminate that position and come up with a better one; one that more accurately describes the diverse technical, independent and highly skilled nature of the position. I implore you.

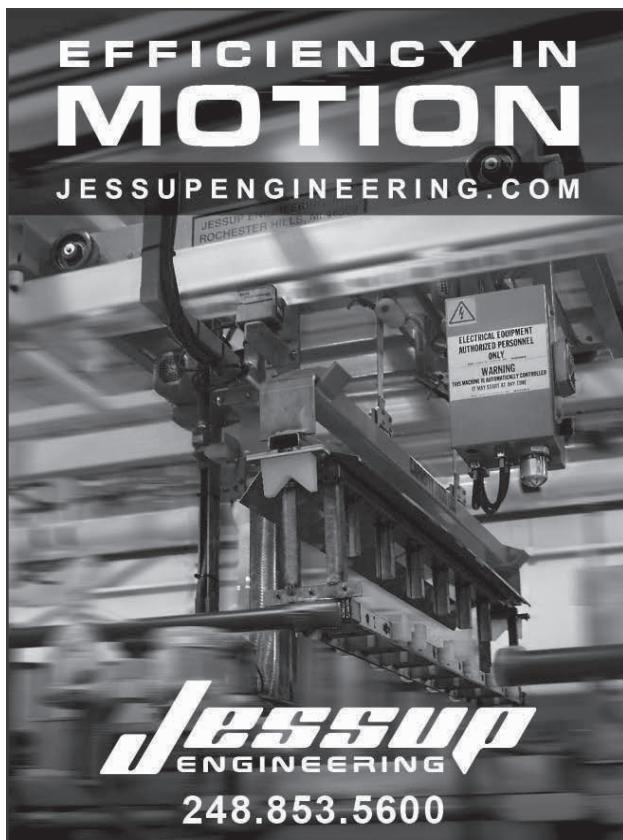
Suggestions for a new title for industrial maintenance, anyone? Now those are emails I welcome. [PF 80](#)

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