

Door Security + Safety

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Trends in Talent and Workforce Development

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THE VALUE OF Vocations

The door security and safety industry is well-positioned to provide members of Generation Z and others excellent career opportunities.

BY KERBY LECKA

FOR YEARS, PROFESSIONALS IN THE DOOR SECURITY AND SAFETY INDUSTRY HAVE BEEN VOICING CONCERNS ABOUT OUR AGING WORKFORCE AND A LACK OF INTERESTED JOB APPLICANTS TO TRAIN, MENTOR, AND EVENTUALLY REPLACE THEM.

Fortunately, new opportunities to address this challenge are emerging, driven by demographic, educational, economic, and technological trends.

For decades, students were told that the gold standard to ensure a good life and comfortable career was through earning a four-year college degree. But that is changing. For example, the average cost of college tuition and fees at public four-year institutions has increased 141% during the past 20 years.¹ During the same period, inflation raised by 67%.² Clearly that math doesn't work anymore for a significant portion of our population.

A closer look at industry trends, along with entry points, job titles, skilled trade positions, and salary ranges, reveals how the door security and safety industry can attract the new talent it needs.

Focusing on Gen Z

Demographically, the 69.6 million members of Gen Z (born between 1997 and 2012.)³ represent a promising talent pool.

By comparison, millennials — 72.7 million strong and born between 1981 and 1996 — are less likely to switch industries, as the youngest of this group are already in their late 20s. Generation Alpha — the newest demographic, representing 46.8 million born between 2013 and the present — will be worth attention in the near future.

Many members of Gen Z are opting to pursue a skilled trade instead of four-year degrees. Since 2011, undergraduate enrollment has declined by 3 million students.⁴ The number of students enrolled in vocational-focused community colleges grew 16% from 2022 to 2023,⁵ driven in part by growing skepticism about the financial return on a traditional college education.

A 2019 analysis by the Georgetown University Center on Education found the 10-year return on investment for a two-year degree was \$141,000 and \$120,000 for a certificate, compared to \$71,000 for a four-year degree.⁶ This supports the idea that pursuing a career as a plumber can offer comparable financial stability to earning a bachelor's degree, without the burden of years of student loan debt.

To be fair, the same analysis showed that over a 40-year period, a bachelor's degree still provides the highest return on investment compared to two-year

degrees and certificates. However, pursuing a skilled trade route likely means trading student debt payments for a home mortgage sooner, rather than potentially delaying homeownership entirely or until the loans are repaid.

Education and economic trends aren't the only factors influencing Gen Z to consider skilled trade careers. Rapid advancements in artificial intelligence (AI) technology have sparked concerns about job security, making careers in skilled trades more attractive.

“Gen Z's comfort with technology — having grown up as digital natives — aligns well with today's blue-collar jobs.”

A recent Blue-Collar Report by Jobber⁷ called “Gen Z and the Uncertain Future of the Trades” found that 56% of Gen Z believes blue-collar work offers greater job security than white-collar desk jobs, especially those where routine tasks are easily completed through automation. They are becoming increasingly aware that even with AI, highly skilled workers are still needed to crawl under, work around, or use equipment to get work done.

Paradoxically, Gen Z's comfort with technology — having grown up as digital natives — aligns well with today's blue-collar jobs. Mobile phones, tablets, and laptops are essential tools integrated into almost all current trade disciplines.

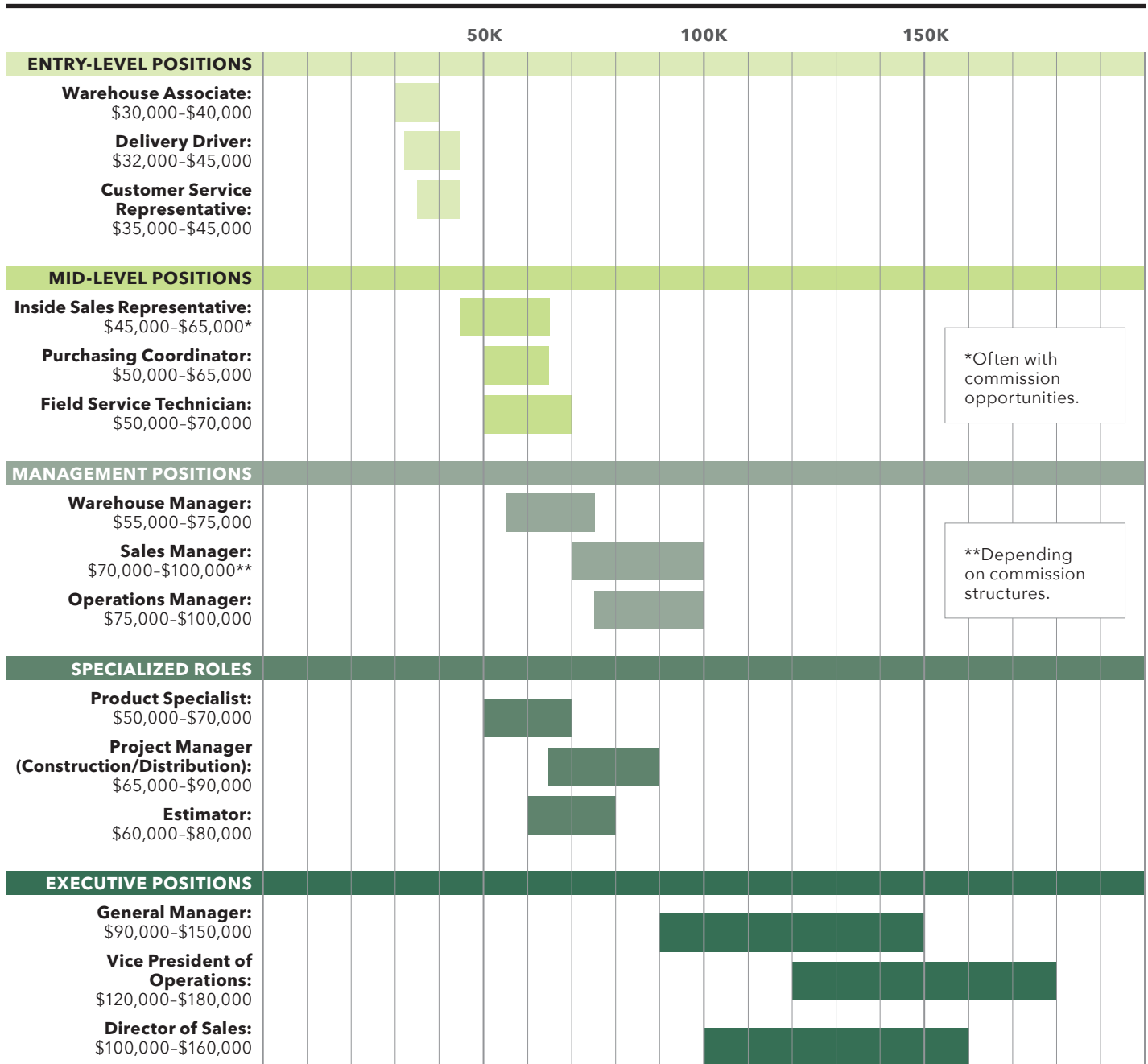
There is a clear opportunity to replace and grow an aging workforce with what many authors have dubbed the “Toolbelt Generation.” How do we attract them to our industry?

Answer Their First Question

Before considering a job, applicants often ask: “What does it pay?”

The door security and safety industry offers a diverse range of career opportunities, blending technical expertise, customer service, and business development. Answering that question requires focus on specific job titles and functions that are

FIGURE 1: SALARIES IN THE DOOR HARDWARE DISTRIBUTION INDUSTRY (PER YEAR)



quite numerous and varied. However, we organized a few categories of positions and salaries — using ChatGPT^{8,9} in our browser — to illustrate that the door security and safety industry offers viable employment for Gen Z. Results are shown in Figure 1 and Figure 2.

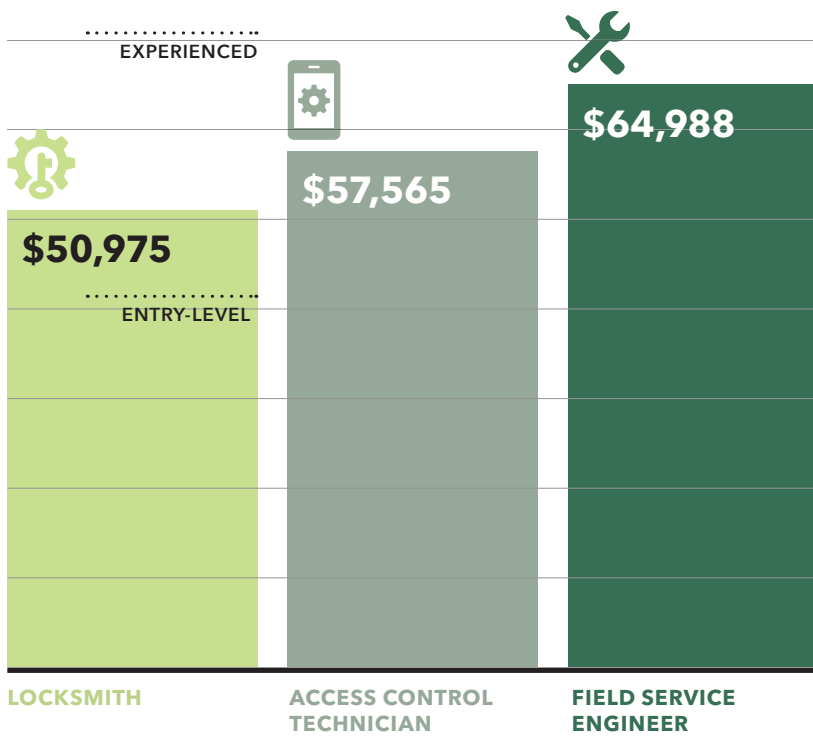
The examples in these figures vary based on factors such as location, experience, and industry segment. For example, locksmiths in California earn an average of \$66,271 per year, higher than the national average.

Skills and Qualifications Needed

Job functions in the door security and safety industry are too varied to list all the necessary skills and qualifications. However, whether it's in the distribution side or the installation and maintenance, industry knowledge is a must. A strong understanding of door hardware products — such as locks, hinges, closers, and access control systems — is required.

For those interested in distribution, key skills include sales experience, an understanding

FIGURE 2: SALARIES IN DOOR HARDWARE INSTALLATION AND MAINTENANCE POSITIONS



The average salary is **\$50,975** per year, equating to **\$24.51** per hour. Entry-level positions start at **\$41,600** annually, while experienced locksmiths can earn up to **\$70,897** per year.

The average salary varies by state. For example, in Washington, the average annual salary is **\$57,565**, which breaks down to **\$27.68** per hour.

The average salary is **\$64,988** per year.

of logistics and supply chain management, technical proficiency, familiarity with computer-aided design (CAD) software, and strong communication abilities, particularly in customer service.

On the installation and maintenance side, essential skills include mechanical aptitude, knowledge of electrical systems, and general troubleshooting skills.

Acquiring Skills and Qualifications

The new DHI education and training program, detailed in the feature article, “DHI Education: Expanding Learning Opportunities for Door Security and Safety Professionals,” on page 16, is designed to enhance industry knowledge and support career growth for those considering careers as door security and safety professionals.

Many companies in the door security and safety industry offer on-the-job training, apprenticeships, and opportunities for specialization or progression into leadership roles.

As with any field, certifications and credentials are essential to employment and career advancement. DHI offers several, including:

- Door and Hardware Industry Associate (DHIA)
- Door + Hardware Technician (DHT)
- Door + Hardware Consultant (DHC)
- Architectural Hardware Consultants (AHC)
- Electrified Hardware Consultants (EHC)
- Certified Fire Door Assembly Inspector (CFDAI)

Demand for trade apprenticeships among high school and college-age members of Gen Z is thriving. According to the Blue-Collar Report by Jobber, 75% of respondents expressed interest in vocational schools offering paid, on-the-job training. However, many people are unaware these programs exist.

A survey by Expand Opportunities¹⁰ found that two in three young adults not pursuing a four-year degree would have considered a non-degree pathway if they had known more about it. Also, schools aren’t providing information about non-degree careers with the same emphasis as they do with four-year degrees.

What Else Can We Do?

- 1. Offer Internships and Apprenticeships:** If your company doesn’t offer internships, apprenticeships, or on-the-job training, consider adding them.
- 2. Support Certifications and Credentialing:** Consider providing tuition support for certifications where appropriate and ensure current employees can access these opportunities.
- 3. Engage Local Resources:** Partner with schools and nonprofit workforce development



organizations to raise awareness of jobs and careers in your company and the door security and safety industry.

- 4. Promote the Industry:** Share the benefits of a career in this field through industry trade shows, local job fairs, speaking engagements, blogs, and social media. Use every opportunity to share why anyone looking for a career should consider our industry.

A Final Thought

In the iconic 1967 movie “The Graduate,” Benjamin Braddock (Dustin Hoffman) is a young man recently out of college. A middle-aged neighbor famously offers him career advice in one word: “Plastics.”

If you’re trying to convince a member of Gen Z that our industry offers a sustainable career, consider this advice: “Doors.”

As of 2018, the United States had an estimated 5.9 million commercial buildings¹¹ — offices, restaurants, stores, schools, and hospitals — with millions of doors requiring maintenance or upgrades to meet building, accessibility, fire and life safety codes, and security requirements. And that’s just the retrofit market. It doesn’t account for transportation and industrial buildings, nor does it include new construction. Depending on the economy, new construction annually represents a door market that is equal to or even larger than the retrofit market.

Doors are everywhere. +

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ENDNOTES

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