

Joe Nicosia

Manufacturing Coordinator

WRTP|BIG STEP

For more than 24 years, Joe Nicosia has used his particular insight into the manufacturing industry to help WRTP|BIG STEP trainees find family-sustaining careers. His insight comes from a previous career as a union negotiator for 25 years. When Nicosia speaks to industry partners, he sometimes surprises them with his knowledge, both of the industry and their companies.

“My time in the union taught me to talk in a company’s lingo,” he said. “It’s helped me to communicate with them, and understand the worker on the shop floor. I was one of those workers, so I do understand.” He credits the success in his current position as Manufacturing Coordinator at WRTP|BIG STEP to his previous employer.

Just like in his union days, he does extensive research on companies before they partner with WRTP|BIG STEP. He asks companies questions they are willing to answer, and susses out what they might not want to answer by speaking with current and former employees. If it sounds like detective work, it’s because it is. He does it for the sake of the company and the trainees WRTP|BIG STEP is considering sending their way.

“I assess a lot of companies myself. I do some research to find out if they’re a stable employer within this community, and what their hiring practices are like,” he explained. “I have a pretty good idea when I walk in the front door to talk to them, what they’re going to say. But I always find some new information.”

Nicosia works with other WRTP|BIG STEP staff to conduct a needs assessment on each industry partner and union representatives every couple of years. He asks

companies about productivity levels, customer loyalty, labor relations, implementation of new technologies, gender disparities,

and vendors. From this information, Nicosia and WRTP|BIG STEP staff help companies establish upskilling programs for their employees. He once suggested to an employer who bought millions of dollars worth of equipment from a vendor to get that same vendor to provide a training program for its workers. Some employers do not even consider ideas like this, but Nicosia’s awareness of their situations helps him determine their needs.

He knows that it is challenging for companies to find the resources to provide training, but he often finds that they work to locate resources when they see what the alternative will cost in not upgrading workers’ skills. For companies that come to that realization themselves, it does not take long for them to look to Nicosia for help, even if it means training employees around their production schedules.

Overall, his focus is on getting companies to do what is best for their employees, which in turn will be what is best for them. This is the thinking that helped him during his years negotiating on behalf of workers. Whereas 50 years ago unions focused on negotiating hire wages, job security, pensions, working conditions, today’s unions



ensure workers have a stable future by focusing on more than wages. This is done by convincing a company to invest in machinery and facilities to grow their business in the long-term and secure a future for their employees. This is why Nicosia believes that labor unions should continue to do more than negotiate contracts by making training part of their demands.

“Unions should play a role by encouraging apprenticeships at companies and other types of training within the facility,” he said. “The age-old thing for years was if a company got into a downturn, the first thing they would cut is the training. But downturns are the perfect time to train.”