Bring Back On-the-Job Training Programs

I can’t say what the future solution to the lab staffing shortage will be, but I believe that looking into the past for ideas might be helpful. Future laboratorians are out there. Maybe we just have to make getting into the lab a little easier.

When I was about to graduate from high school, the teacher in my health assistance class gave me information about an on-the-job training program at The South Side Hospital of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. I sent in my transcripts, completed an application, and took a manual dexterity test in preparation for the interview and selection process. I was chosen and began in July 1977. For the next year, I did phlebotomy rounds each morning, then rotated through departments doing hands-on tech work, followed by classroom work in the afternoons. I subsequently became CLA(ASCP) certified in 1978 and was hired at the hospital full time in the chemistry department. I studied for ASCP’s MLT exam and took the test when I qualified with 5 years experience. I stayed in the lab as a generalist for the next 16 years. I moved into an LIS manager position in 1994 and have worked in IT since then.

I believe that offering on-the-job training programs should be reconsidered. I can say without hesitation that my entire laboratory career has been great. How it all started was perfect for my personality and learning style. I think many teens finishing high school would be attracted to a program like this, and many seasoned laboratorians would be happy to share their knowledge as instructors. I hope you will consider it as a possible solution to the staffing problems laboratories face.

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ASCP President Lee H. Hilborne responds:

Thank you for your note about how to attract others to the laboratory profession. On-the-job training and career paths are among the avenues ASCP has identified as priority areas to attract people to the field. We are interested in working with laboratory education programs to develop additional venues for those considering laboratory careers. Perhaps we could work with industry and other organizations to identify opportunities for students in school to work at laboratories and gain some experience—ultimately translating into seeking a laboratory career. Let’s continue to think together about additional strategies to address the workforce shortage.