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Mike: From the Center for Occupational Research and Development, welcome to Preparing Technicians for the Future of Work. I'm your host Mike Lesiecki. In each podcast we'll reach out to people who are actually on the frontline of the future of work and hear what they have to say. That means interviews with industry, interviews with working technicians, and forward thinkers in the field. We'll do some background research and we'll curate that research to make sure you have the most up-to-date and relevant information. And in every episode will suggest action that you can take. We want to inspire you to take that action.

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Today joining us is Amanda Falvey. And she's the Director of Human Resources at BRP Marine group. Welcome, Amanda. Tell us a little bit about yourself and your company.

Amanda: Sure, Mike. So, thank you so much for providing me the opportunity to speak with you today. So, I'm a proud Evinrude employee since 2001. I've been with this business now nearly two decades and it's really been an inspiring journey. For the members of the audience that might not be fully familiar with our brand or our brand's history, we've actually been an iconic brand for decades. The Evinrude outboard engine was actually first conceived in 1909 by Ole Evinrude. So, this year we'll actually be celebrating our 110th anniversary! The brand actually spent a few decades as a part of the Outboard Marine Corporation before the closure of that business. And in 2001 Bombardier actually

acquired both the physical assets of the Johnson and Evinrude brands. We've been in business ever since, and it's really been an exciting 18 months. We've actually been transforming to achieve our vision of becoming the most innovative marine company in the industry. And, as a part of that journey, we recently acquired three boat companies: Alumacraft, Manitou, and Telwater in Australia.

Mike: Interesting. We first met you, Amanda, and your company, when we had the opportunity to visit your facilities there. And one of the questions that we had, we talked a little bit about then, is: Amanda, what are you looking for, in terms of a technician? And how do you know what you're looking for?

Amanda: Yeah, well, Mike, a good question. And, as you know, we had lengthy discussions around that during the visit. Obviously, there's a conversation around the future of the technician workforce, but it's actually part of a larger conversation we're having at the enterprise level. I'm about talent acquisition. Really gone are the days of "post and pray." And you hear a lot lately about the war for talent which certainly implies a lot of hand-to-hand combat and competition for resources. But honestly, I don't think this is authentically the way we frame our values or approach as we're looking at the source technicians for our team.

We've actually, you know, shifted into being more relational and earning our way into talented candidates' consideration, kind of, by showing who we are and what we have to offer. So, perhaps the long answer to a very direct question, but certainly I think that we've developed a new level of openness in terms of pipelining candidates. We're certainly looking at some of the fundamental skills, but have also started kind of opening ourselves up to a number of networking conversations and building relationship across multiple domains to find the talented technicians of the future.

Mike: Amanda, I think one of those approaches to building those sort of relationships has been to partner closely with the technical college in your area, that's Gateway Technical College. What is that program you've created there? Will you tell us more about that?

Amanda: Sure, Mike. So, when you're referencing the MMOPP...I know that's quite an acronym, so I'll unpack that for you.

It's the Motorcycle, Marine, and Outdoor Power Product program. So, really the creation of this partnership with Gateway actually has been incredibly energizing and ultimately productive, which is a perfect combination.

I had actually received a call from Bryan Albrecht, the president at Gateway Technical College, almost two years ago now. And he reached out to me, based upon an article he had actually just read in a trade magazine about the shortage of marine technicians. And, sort of out of that conversation and trying to expand our thinking, we kind of asked ourselves a key question: How could we actually get those in industry—you know, larger than Evinrude, larger than BRP Marine—involved in developing a curriculum that actually served multiple channels? Thankfully, through the collaboration of many industry partners and actually, frankly, a lot of hard work, we were able to answer that question. Which is, yes, ultimately when we get people involved, we were able to put together a compelling curriculum that attracted students for now, I believe. We are in the second year of that program and we continue to see improved attendance. And I think really the secret sauce there was twofold: the collaboration certainly with the college. I mean, Gateway is absolutely outstanding! The caliber of their staff and the passion that they bring to the process is just amazing. But I think the other portion that really made that successful was the collaboration with other employers. I really think everybody came in very much working from an "abundance" versus a "scarcity" mindset. And that really brought a different level of collaboration.

Mike: So, Amanda, if I've got it right, this isn't just for students who want to go to BRP, but rather there's a spectrum of job opportunities that you and your fellow industry people have created, right?

Amanda: Yeah, absolutely. So, there was a conversation initially around just having it be in the Marine space. And really, I think, as we had a reflection about how do we keep our eyes on the prize in a larger, more holistic, picture? Which is we genuinely have to believe that, in order to attract students to the program, we wanted to make sure that there wasn't a one-to-one ratio between the curriculum and job placement. I think we all felt that providing them with a diversity of skills ultimately would provide a larger number of opportunities, a larger student pipeline, and that ultimately, like I said, you know we're better

together. So, that was the genesis of saying: Let's not just make that Marine but also the Motorcycle and Outdoor Power Products portion.

Mike: Actually, that sounds really good! In the Show Notes, I'm going put a link to that program at Gateway Technical College. I believe it's a one-year certificate program isn't that right, Amanda?

Amanda: That's correct.

Mike: One more question on that. As part of that, do the students, who are in that program, are they able to get work experiences? Internships? Anything like that? Is that part of that?

Amanda: Yeah. So, it's not a guarantee. But the way that the curriculum was developed is: there's a portion of it that is certainly classroom, more theoretical learning. But part of the lab, if you ever have the opportunity to see it—and it's really special-- it's worth the visit, if you can make it—you'll see that the way that the lab is actually laid out provides a lot of opportunity for actual hands-on application of the learning. And I think that's one of the things that Gateway does exceptionally well, which is this "mixed-mode learning" that allows you to learn the concepts, but then apply them. So, obviously students coming out of that program, whether it's with BRP Marine and Evinrude, or with another employer in the area, definitely going to have an advantage. They know the concepts. They've also applied them in a real-world context. And so, when you're looking at a static resume and kind of comparing one candidate to another, somebody that has that applied experience certainly is going to have a "leg up" in terms of skills and competencies consideration for a role.

In terms of co-op and internship, we have a very strong program here. We welcome many students across many different disciplines every year. And so, while we can't systematically provide a guarantee, we definitely want to make sure that the people coming out of the MMOPP program are part of the consideration set for opportunities with us.

Mike: That sounds really good. Let's change gears for a second. And let's think about the future of work. What about your current employees? How do you handle upskilling? Right now,

what processes do you use to make their skills current and relevant?

Amanda: We really pride ourselves on a learning culture. And one of the things you should know about our Performance Management Program is systematically, as part of setting objectives, we also set up "Personal Development Plans." And so, really what we're trying to do is to make sure whatever we're asking our employees to do, there's that real, candid conversation about "How are we doing what we need to do as an employer?"—to support, providing additional training, whether that's internal or external, and giving them, really, the tools that they need in order to execute to an ever-evolving business environment. So, certainly I think that it's happening at the enterprise level. There's some training that we're providing to everybody. But then there's also more individual targeted plans that directly correlate the development plan to the strategic business plan.

Mike: Cool. Here's another question, a tough one. So, I want to ask you to get your crystal ball out.

Amanda: Okay!

Mike: I remember, as we looked at your facility, the increasing levels of automation. What about this emerging trend to more manufacturing automation, the term "digital transformation" is used quite a bit. Is BRP in that process?

And, now thinking about those workforce entrants coming to you. Are you looking for them to have, not only those mechanical skills, but digital skills as well? A pretty complicated question there. But, what do you think about that emerging trend in skills?

Amanda: Yeah, absolutely. So, you're right, I didn't bring my crystal ball today. But let me take a whack at that! So obviously, I'll walk it back to kind of what we want to be in terms of "the company we want to be five years from now." Obviously, we have a Financial Plan, and that is supported by a Product Development Plan. And then, obviously, in order to make sure year over year we continue to be a profitable company and a growing company, we really have a focus on "How do we improve our business processes and our operational processes?" And so, we're always looking for opportunities to utilize automation or different systems to get better year over year. And, as you

can well imagine, that means then we need to bring our employees with us on that journey. So, there's no big light switch in a closet that we plan to "throw" one day and suddenly be digital. It's actually more a product of a lot of hard work and a strategic plan that will extend—not just the next 12 months but—the next 12 to 36. And so, yes, we're constantly working on becoming a better company.

And I think that relates back, Mike, to some of the conversations we've had previously, which is we are actively hiring employees right now. So, we're certainly looking at who we hire from two different perspectives. One is: Do they bring the immediate skills that they need in order to be successful in a role? But the other is: Do they bring the competencies, i.e., the ability and knowledge to transform and come on that journey with us? So, that's again definitely something that dominates a lot of our conversations, ambition, and winning attitude, to get better year over year, and to set the right framework now in terms of human capital, to make sure that we're able to achieve that vision.

Mike: Amanda, I like that idea of inviting your workforce to join you on that journey as you move forward in these various areas. That's pretty interesting! I think people would want to be part of that. That's my opinion.

Amanda: Yeah! Absolutely. And I think, certainly in interviews and conversations that we have, that's definitely a core part of—kind of the exploration we do—about is it going to work for the company? And is it going to work for the employee joining the company? There certainly needs to be reciprocity there if it's going to be a good, long term, productive relationship. So, those interview questions are centering around "Hey, help demonstrate what you know today," but also "Let's talk about the level of agility and openness you have to going through this transformation with us."

Mike: I think that's going to lead me right into my almost-last question today, Amanda. What advice would you give? Let's suppose I'm an 18- to 24-year old. I might be working in some other industry. I might be in that program at Gateway. And I'm getting ready. I'm trying to get a job interview with BRP Marine. Okay, I've sort of made it past the screen. What advice would you give to that person who is going to come in and interview with you for the first time? What should they try to convey to you?

Amanda: I'm a true believer in authenticity. I think it's really getting prepared by being able to talk about yourself. I would call it "in a past, present, and future context." Really, what we're looking for is: What have you done? What applied knowledge do you have that we can immediately capitalize on when you join us? What do you think you can bring to the current role? But also, where do you want to go in the future? And being able to have a really clear vision of what that looks like.

When I look at employees that come in and integrate most rapidly into our culture, what I consistently see is: those are some of the same people that, in interviews, translated that passion for what we do. So, certainly we want to pay people fairly and equitably for the work that they do, but we also are hoping that there's something that they find in terms of that work that's emotionally and intellectually stimulating. So, I think the best thing you can do is come in and be prepared, but also show that authenticity and that commitment to, not only the job, but to BRP's mission.

Mike: That's pretty strong advice, Amanda. I think anyone listening, whether it's BRP Marine or whatever company that are interested, should come across like that. I like that term, "the authenticity."

Amanda: Yes.

Mike: Today Amanda, it's been interesting, because we talked about lots of things. We talked about "posting and praying." I love that term that's probably not the best way to find the technician of the future—by "posting and praying."

Amanda: Well, not anymore! [laughing]

Mike: Right—the war for talent. Hopefully you and your other colleagues across the industry segments are maybe not so much at war with each other as you're working together to make this all happen. So, I like that. And, then I thought, as we talked about these emerging trends in the future, when you said "You know, Mike, there's no light switch that's gonna be thrown." That really struck me. It's a process that you're going through over the next few years, and you're inviting people to join you on that journey. Pretty cool.

Amanda: Yeah, absolutely. And I think, Mike, that that goes back to the whole notion of agility and resilience. The modern

world of work means there's not a job probably that exists any longer where you can come in and anticipate doing the same thing every day. We're constantly in motion, and we are really eager and excited to have people join the team that finds energy from that constant progress and transformation.

Mike: I've got it! Thanks, Amanda. I want to thank you again for joining us today on the podcast, and also for being part of our project. You and your company helped us look into that crystal ball back when we visited you. And I really appreciate your comments today, Amanda.

Amanda: Oh again, Mike, thanks so much for having me.

Mike: Okay. Goodbye then.

Amanda: Bye.

Mike: That's it for today listeners. We were really struck when Amanda talked about "agility and resilience" in the modern workforce. She told us how they look for that right from that very first interview, and she said that translates into success in employees at her company. So, your task for today is to take a look at the Show Notes. We put a link to that program at Gateway Technical College. It was developed in concert with a number of industry partners in their area. It was designed to help to prepare technicians for a variety of industries, a variety of career opportunities. You might consider if you can do something like that in your area. That's your action for today.

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