

THE SUN-TIMES 100

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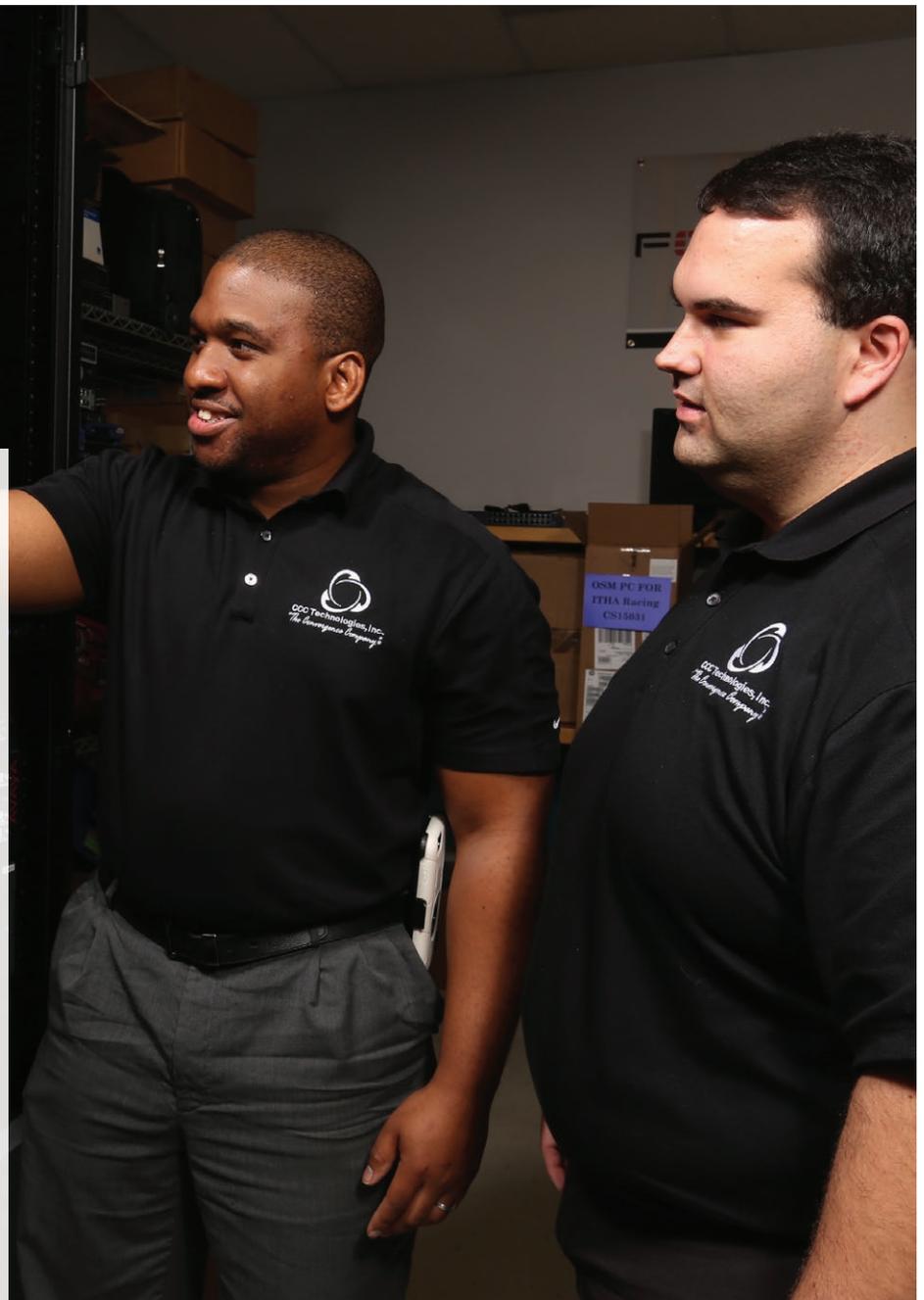
How DeVry engineering tech grads earn A-plus jobs at CCC

BY LOU CARLOZO
STM Custom Studios

Imagine having your very own pipeline—and a first-class one at that—that feeds new employees into your successful business with regularity and reliability. Sounds like a “pipe dream,” right? To be sure, it’s a rare thing—but with two DeVry University campuses supplying new engineers to CCC Technologies in Wood Dale, the reality boils down to a success story now going on for more than a decade.

“More than a third of our engineering workforce is made up of DeVry grads,” says Jim Poull, president and owner of CCC, which handles security and support for areas ranging from data to voice, video and cloud-based applications.

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Poull likes to say, “If it has a blinking light, CCC probably supports it.” And the support behind the support, if you will, comes from DeVry alums fresh from the Chicago and Addison campuses. Poull adds that it’s become such a good fit that today, “We participate heavily in DeVry career fairs, career days and job postings—it’s become our key source of new talent. They’ve maxi-

mized our potential for finding it and that’s the hard part of the business.”

Poull, who became owner of CCC 10 years ago, says the DeVry connection started organically. “One of the first engineers we ever hired from DeVry told of us another engineer in his class, and in a few years it became this great talent pool.”

Yet it’s become much more than a one-way effort. CCC works closely with DeVry on a number of levels, ranging from interaction with the school’s career counselors to involvement on the advisory council and group committee level. It’s all serving to grow employment ties that have mutual benefit.

“The great thing about DeVry is that once they have

you educated, they want to help you go out there and get a job,” Poull says. The DeVry-based new hires come to CCC with sharp textbook skills, making the main challenge one of getting them up to speed in the customer service realm.

To that end, an alumni club-type paradigm applies. “What’s nice is that they get to be around DeVry peers

and senior engineers, and start to feel more comfortable with standing in front of a customer and dealing with them.”

Poull is hard pressed to find any drawbacks with the DeVry connection, except for one: “They make it very challenging for us because they’ve got so much talent.”

The big three: The top-level skills today’s employers want

BY LOU CARLOZO

STM Custom Studios

It’s given that a major turnover in the workforce is coming: fast. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, total employment in the U.S. economy is projected to grow by 15.6 million during the 2012-2022 decade to reach 161 million—an increase of nearly 11 percent. And for those in the business and financial operations field, the increase will shoot even higher: 12.5 percent, BLS estimates show.

Yet as the work force offers more opportunity, it invites more competition as well. So the question remains: What are the top skills employers of all stripes are searching for? Here we present three crucial tips to hone your skill set so that it complements what employers want.

High-level tech proficiency. Here’s where millennials hold a distinct advantage. They’re adept not only with the latest versions of smartphones and tablets, but also with what the technology has to offer.

They routinely stream online educational content from massive open online courses (MOOCs) and resources such as the Khan Academy—which means they can take next level training into their own hands. But you don’t have to be under 35 to grasp all this and more: Many employers in the white-collar sector will expect proficiency with the Microsoft Office suite. Make sure you learn how to work Excel and PowerPoint before you get the call.

Active listening. Sounds simple, right? But right from the first interview, the hiring brass will discern whether you listen and understand—or interrupt and ramble. “The first step is for someone to recognize that they’re likely not in the habit of listening at all—few of us are,” says Tracy Benson, founder and CEO of business consultancy On the Same Page. “I recommend trying this experiment: Casually ask someone who’s talking to you to pause for a moment after a few minutes so that you can confirm that you understand what’s being said. Then repeat back to them

what you heard them say.” That last part represents the active listening component.

Training and experience above and beyond. While you don’t want to come across as overqualified for any role, employers will look to see what skills or achievements place you a cut above. So first and foremost, look at the application. If it

says, “Bachelor’s degree required, master’s degree preferred,” you’ll want to parade your master’s degree skills. What’s more, 10 years of consulting experience, for example, is not as focused and powerful as “worked as a consultant to clients that included these Fortune 500 companies: _____.” Then fill in the blank on your way to an interview invitation.

