



I first saw the opportunity to pitch at **Auto Care Connect Week** in a LinkedIn post. Curious but unsure, I picked up the phone and called my ACPN Leadership 2.0 cohort partner, **Joe Thomas** to get his thoughts. He said, “It’s a great opportunity for exposure, but you probably won’t win.”

Game on, Joe. I got to work.

What followed was one of the most intense professional experiences of my career. Crafting a meaningful three-minute pitch proved daunting — how could I condense eight years of grassroots impact into just a few minutes? I leaned on my network of incredible industry supporters, but my secret weapon was my pitch coach, **Donna Wagner**. If you know Donna’s background, you know what kind of powerhouse she is. With her help, I refined the message, identified the emotional core and uncovered a narrative hook that truly resonated:

The Hidden Pathway: Content Catalog Manager

In that pitch, I framed the *Catalog Content Manager* role as a symbol of everything we’re missing in workforce development. It’s one of the most in-demand jobs in the aftermarket today, yet parents, students — even educators — rarely know it exists. This is a massive problem. We can’t fill positions if no one knows they’re even an option.

And the reality is, this isn’t just about one role. Our industry is full of hidden career pathways that blend business, technology and automotive knowledge. But we keep them hidden in plain sight. If we want to grow our workforce, we must start by shining a light on these hidden gems.

Enter: Give Me TEN

That’s where **Give Me TEN** comes in. It’s a structured, **10-hour mentorship model** designed to connect students with real-world employers in the automotive and aftermarket sectors. The goal? Show students what’s possible — and give businesses a head start in building tomorrow’s workforce.

- **Students donate 10 hours** of their time: two hours job shadowing, eight hours hands-on experience.
- **Employers donate 10 hours** of theirs: providing mentorship, feedback and a window into their business.
- **Repairing Partnerships:** Education and industry are at a disconnect. We need to get industry back into the classroom to participate in advisory meetings. If

shop owners and industry partners can see a pipeline to their future workforce, they hopefully return to this partnership.

The program began eight years ago when local shop owners in my community, including myself, faced a shared problem: we couldn't hire techs. Not because students weren't interested, but because they had no idea what the job really involved. So, we asked: What if we each donated just 10 hours to show students the ropes?

We quickly learned that some students wanted to be technicians, but others did not. They did love cars and our industry. That led to the next big question: What if they could try another 10 hours in a different role—like content catalog management, service advisor, parts counter person or warehousing? The goal is to keep them in our industry. This is the beauty of Give Me TEN. This program allows a student to see what's possible in ten hours in any part of the industry. It's easy for the student and easy for the business partner. To be honest, bringing a student into your business brings a new dynamic into your workplace.

The Program Today

What started with **10 shops and six students in a single automotive program** has grown to:

- All career pathways at the Lake County Tech Campus adopting the model schoolwide. This reflects 20 career pathway programs and more than 2,000 students and 300 business partners.
- Multiple CTE schools in Oregon have adopted the program.
- Illinois CTE schools are currently adopting the Give Me TEN program for the 2025-26 school year.
- The programs model has been presented at many work-based learning conferences across the country.

Give Me TEN is now a scalable, replicable model that allows businesses and schools to work together without red tape. It creates entry-level engagement, builds awareness of career options and gives employers a say in shaping future talent.

Our industry is suffering with lack of support to grow our future workforce. We all talk about the skilled labor shortage –but who is really doing something about it? The independent shops don't have the funding or time to explore workforce growth. Companies who have hidden career pathways to success might not look to education for a partnership. It's time to create a simplified way to grow your next workforce. ACPN took the lead to showcasing new opportunities by creating the pitch competition, which is a step in the right direction.

Final Thoughts

The message I shared on that stage was simple and terrifying. This competition meant so much to me I choked. I had some interruptions on stage that threw me off as I had to memorize the three-minute presentation repeatedly. I believe in the message and the ask is simple, it can support your business growth. 10 hours can change a student's life and change your workforce pipeline forever.

I may have entered the pitch competition to share an idea, but I walked away with something more: a platform, a win and a renewed mission to connect education with employment.

So, I ask you: Are you in? Let's build the workforce of the future—10 hours at a time.