

Good News: America Addresses Manufacturing Challenges.

A Letter from Warren Young, CEO

Deloitte and the Manufacturing Institute recently reported that an estimated 600,000 skilled positions in advanced manufacturing are going unfilled. Few would view this reality as anything but a threat to American Manufacturing. There is good news to report, however. America has now awakened to the seriousness of this situation and many different groups are starting to address it. Once a major obstacle to the health of America's livelihood is visible and recognized as critical, the energy and resolve by its citizens to address it can accomplish great things.

It is encouraging to see what is happening in the Chicago area. The absolute necessity of enlarging the availability of a skilled workforce has been embraced and many different entities are engaging in ways to deal with the two main facets of the problem: attracting people to careers in manufacturing and providing them with the skills needed to fill available positions. Many of our high schools, community colleges, trade associations, and other training institutions are enhancing their curriculums in manufacturing and offering certification credentials to students preparing for careers in manufacturing. Manufacturers are collaborating with these training institutions to identify the appropriate skills required to meet their needs. Manufacturers are also committing to hire interns during their training period with the opportunity to place them in jobs once the interns complete training. More than 20 Chicago and Illinois area community colleges are now collaborating to seek government grants to enlarge their facilities and establish programs to address the workforce training requirements for the future. Discussions have also begun about how to focus resources to provide more sophisticated equipment in training facilities and ensure that it is shared and utilized more efficiently.

Attracting people to careers in manufacturing is a challenge. Part of our task is to increase the public awareness that manufacturing is, in fact, not dead or sent exclusively to offshore locations like China and India. We also need to redirect the skills we use for marketing our products and services towards convincing students and prospective workers that a career in manufacturing can be exciting, satisfying and rewarding. Part of the good news is that this critical need is being addressed and resources are being applied to create media messages that will communicate this important story to students and prospective workers.

The good news is that manufacturers, educational institutions, and government bodies are all stepping up now to address these challenges with the skill and availability of our workforce. Now we must complete what has begun with all of these efforts to ensure the workforce we require for tomorrow will be there to sustain and grow our businesses.