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Stepping Up to the Plate

By Terry Iverson

Times need to change. I have been working in the manufacturing world since 1980. Now, not a day goes by that someone doesn't bemoan the fact they cannot find enough skilled people to satisfy their workforce requirements. Over the last 38 years, it has gotten increasingly worse.

For my first 15 years, I could offer selling a CNC machine tool and train their existing workforce to setup, program and operate a machine that I sold. That was my answer at that time. Now the problem is that the workforce we used to be able to train isn't there.

With that realization, I jumped into the educational sector. I volunteered on dozens of local and national technical educational and advisory boards for high schools, technical and community colleges across several states. This still wasn't enough.

Our industry needs to be more effectively changing outdated perceptions so manufacturing can become top-of-mind for a viable career.

Finally, the day embarked that I came up with a concept that had potential to make a difference nationally. The concept was Champion Now! This slogan is an acronym that stands for: "Change How American Manufacturing's Perceived In Our Nation."

With my newly minted cause, I made what seemed like countless presentations to high schools and colleges. True, I was making a small impact, but it still wasn't enough. To catch the wave of what seemed to be significant resurgence of manufacturing in this country, I stepped up to the plate and wrote a book about the need for and ways to change the perception of a manufacturing career in our country. The time seems ripe for this discussion. The book is finished and will be available soon from championnow.org.

My hope is to change the cultural perception by making working hard with your hands and mind cool again. It should be considered honorable and revered by our peers. The time has come for us to stop looking down on those who find these skills and talents to be their passion—their inspiration and motivation to go to work every day.

It's a clear message. We all need to get involved. At this time, we have a reshoring movement under way with work coming back here, but where are the people to fill our factories and do the work that has come back to the U.S.?

We need to solve the huge student debt crisis where

young people find themselves buried in a mountain of payments, yet unable to find a decent paying job with their four-year degree. Advocating for a more targeted and less expensive degree coupled with revised thinking of manufacturing as a career, could find the worker-shortened market saturated with applicants.

If education's deliverables can synchronize with industry's skills needs, good paying jobs can be matched with young people who want to work. Our industry needs to be more effectively changing outdated perceptions, so manufacturing can become top-of-mind for a viable career.

What can *you* do? While getting involved is daunting, time consuming and overwhelming, my first suggestion is to do just that. Every October brings Manufacturing Day and Manufacturing Month. If you are a manufacturer, get involved. Open your plant up to local parents and students. This is the way to change their perceptions. If you are a parent, reach out to your child's school and inquire about Manufacturing Day tours. If you are an educator, attend a Manufacturing Day tour and discover what good-paying careers are available.

Maybe some of these suggestions can empower and inspire an entire generation. The simple fact is that we are still the greatest country in the world. To help maintain that position, we need to become the industrial powerhouse we once were. We must first create wealth through manufacturing before we can spend it. Our children and grandchildren deserve better and will appreciate our efforts down the road.

This is a time in our country's history where returning to manufacturing excellence has never been more important. In order to do this, to bring our manufacturing back from overseas, we need more skilled labor. Skilled baby boomers are retiring from manufacturing positions. We need the next generation to fill them with computer savvy workers in an electronic and digital era. The next generation are well suited to step in, if they get the skilled training required and understand that good career opportunities exist in the manufacturing sector. I believe the time is now. **PM**



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