

Challenges Facing Today's Manufacturing Industry

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0 Comment



March 7, 2012 The manufacturing industry has been beleaguered by obstacles. Nearly every news outlet has covered the closing of factories, labor disputes between companies and their employees or reductions in force due to the shift of labor off-shore. The reputation of the industry has been marred by low wages and less than desirable working conditions, in addition to quality-control [problems](#).

But, according to Paul Golden, founder and managing partner of [Schilling Ventures, LLC](#), the biggest obstacle facing the manufacturing sector today is the lack of [skilled training](#). Schilling Ventures builds market-leading industrial companies through strategic counsel on lean

operations. Employers are struggling to find individuals who are skilled and mechanically adept. "Workers don't know enough trade skills. This is compounded by many school districts failing at the basics of education for individuals headed to the shop floor," Golden says. The lack of skilled laborers, he says, hinders [productivity](#), creating a disadvantage against off-shore competitors. Additionally, many companies struggle to find employees with strong work ethics, instead finding those who opt for lower pay in exchange for less quality work.

"China and India can compensate for lack of skills by adding labor, as wages are comparatively low," Golden says. However, in the U.S., manufacturers must rely on their employees to improve productivity and achieve higher revenues. And, in an already over-worked sector, this may be hard to achieve. "Without strong skills, shop floor workers won't drive those benefits," he adds.

Adding to the problem is the lack of quality engineers joining the manufacturing sector. According to Golden, many engineers are

looking towards Web and software firms, leaving the industry hurting for creative talent for product development efforts. In addition, manufacturing is no longer viewed as "the" place to go for young, well-educated professionals. "Software, Wall Street and consulting have become the in places to be," Golden says. "Without [innovation](#), price becomes the competitive basis, and U.S. cost structures can't match those from off-shore without exceptional productivity."

The obstacles addressed by Golden are not without solutions. The industry needs to recreate a positive image of manufacturing that once enticed the brightest professionals to the sector. "We need to make manufacturing 'in' again, highlighting the fortunes created and the valuable contribution made from manufacturing so that we can attract our best and brightest." He believes this can be done by creating a "Do it for America" type ethos which will help attract students to the engineering and science fields.

In addition, school districts must ramp up their vocational training programs. Although he has seen more specific training programs through partnerships between manufacturers and trade schools, Golden believes this is an effective "band-aid to the fundamental educational problems in the U.S." He suggests a program similar to Germany's apprentice and trade education track that cultivates students interesting in joining the manufacturing sector. "We should be able to create a U.S. version that promotes the pride of a trade skill, opportunity to earn a great living and the ability to parlay that trade into a business ownership."

Manufacturing and trade skills were once regarded as a sure route to the American dream. But as society evolves, perceptions change and industries that were considered a viable route to success must now take steps to transform public perception and align reputations with the opportunities that still exist.

Angela Stringfellow is a PR and MarComm Consultant and Social Media Strategist offering full-circle marketing solutions to businesses. Angela blogs via [Contently.com](#).

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