

Is the American Dream Out of Reach?

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Earlier this month, CNN posted an article that said that nearly 6 in 10 people who responded to CNNMoney's American Dream Poll, conducted by ORC International, feel "the American dream" — however they define it — is out of reach.

Much of this negativity comes from adults under the age of 34 finding it hard to get good jobs. Interesting timing — right as we wrap up *IMPO's* annual Jobs Report.

Unfortunately, as a few of our expert sources suggested in this year's report (kicking off on page 29), manufacturing has a perception problem. The reality is, this issue is full of positive news when it comes to the manufacturing sector and its prospects for growth. Perhaps the divide comes from the prevailing concept of where the "good jobs" are. Maybe the industry's best kept secret is that they're here.

On page 30, *IMPO's* associate editor Tia Nowack talks to analysts about the segments in the manufacturing sector that are gaining ground, including which areas might benefit from re-shoring overseas production. One of these analysts, Dan North, chief economist for Euler Hermes North America, says the manufacturing sectors that have the most to gain by re-shoring production include the chemical industry, automotive and high tech and value added manufacturing, such as computers and electronics. North also says that as the United States continues to export more petroleum and natural gas, the energy sector will also benefit, as will related sectors such as pipe and equipment manufacturers.

Additionally, manufacturers like SCHOTT North America of Lebanon, PA, a manufacturer of special glass and glass-related systems, have launched homegrown programs to help develop the skills they need for specific positions in growing areas, like electro-mechanical technicians responsible for operating and maintaining new capital equipment for glass forming. "We set up the apprentice program because of our future attrition rates. Most of our employees are long-term

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and approximately 60 percent of our workforce will be eligible for retirement in the next 10 years,” Sandra J. Herman, PHR, asst. manager, Human Resources for SCHOTT North America in Duryea, PA told us. “Also, the skill set that we need in our manufacturing area is very specific to the glass industry, which is very hard to find. I believe if more companies would start an apprenticeship program, the skill gap will begin to shrink.”

Smart manufacturers will have the kind of foresight that SCHOTT does, and work to develop transition efforts and succession planning to address the knowledge gap that could result from the Baby Boomer retirement. In fact, says the AARP, for the next 18 years, boomers will be turning 65 at a rate of about 8,000 a day. The results of these programs keep manufacturers afloat, and boost the job prospects for a younger crop of workers.

On page 46, regular columnist Mike Collins argues that the middle class is in decline – but hopes the industry is not powerless to fix it. And really that’s what this annual issue is all about: trying to shed some light on the ways manufacturers are working to enable their own success and, in turn, create new opportunities for industry skill and career development. So what's your contribution?

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