



Built On Collaboration.

*Successful Workforce
Development*

Minnesota's Twin Cities area has become a national model for workforce development in the manufacturing sector. I will be writing a series of articles for Manufacturing Success about how Minnesota manufacturers are collaborating with nonprofits, foundations, state economic development agencies, high schools and technical colleges to expand opportunity, increase competitiveness and build our talent pool.

I am co-owner of a third-generation metal-forming company with 50 employees. We make steel hinges and other metal parts sold worldwide. Like other manufacturers, we are in the race of our lives for skilled talent right now. Being able to find, train and retain people to fill skilled manufacturing jobs in our plants is much more than a vexing problem. It will literally become a matter of business survival for many of us in the next decade. Figuring out the solution is crucial, not only for helping our businesses succeed in global markets but also for understanding how our lower-skilled incumbent and entry-level workers can get on and stay on a career ladder that increases

their skills so that they can create enough value for our companies to earn family-sustaining wages and benefits.

The M-Powered project has been one of Minnesota's most successful workforce development projects. M-Powered offers a three-phase training program for entry-level job seekers, and men and women already working who seek advancement in the manufacturing sector. M-Powered partners participated in curriculum and program design, developed criteria for enrollment, and made sure that the number of students graduating from the program matches the current demand for new employees.

When I go out to speak at local inner-city high schools, I know that less than 60 percent of current ninth graders will graduate from high school in four years. Less than 25 percent of our high school graduates will ever receive a traditional four-year college diploma. That leaves a large portion of the student population whose only viable



*M-Powered graduates
with instructor
Tony VanDanacker.*

employment options may be low-paying jobs in the service sector – jobs that do not create enough value to pay a living wage. The leaders behind M-Powered want a significant number of those people to recognize and grasp the opportunity that exists in manufacturing.

HIREd, founded in 1968, is a leading Twin Cities area provider of job-skills training and employment training. For M-Powered HIREd staff conduct the initial screening and assessment of potential participants, and provide much of the coaching that participants need to succeed in the workplace. HIREd helps problem-solving entry-level trainees become more self-sufficient by transportation issues, clarifying what is expected of them in the workplace, teaching crisis management – like what to do when you have a sick child and still need to get to work – and the importance of being drug- and alcohol-free.

According to Barbara Dyer, Hitachi Foundation President and CEO, “Lower skilled people move from the economic fringes into the mainstream of family-supporting careers by moving up the career ladder. There needs to be transparency from entry-level on up through the supervisory ranks about opportunities for advancement; and training must be available to enable workers to gain the proficiencies necessary to succeed.”

To date, nearly 300 men and women have graduated from Level One of the M-Powered project. The U.S. Department of Labor just recognized M-Powered with its highest award for workforce development in 2008. The M-Powered model is being expanded to MNSCU manufacturing programs at St. Paul and Anoka Technical Colleges.

Collaboration is the Key

Describing the challenge of workforce development in the manufacturing sector as a “race for our lives” is far from hyperbole. From a global business perspective, the manufacturers that can develop and train the highest-skilled workforce within the next decade are going to win.

Collaboration among businesses, nonprofits, foundations, state economic development agencies, and technical colleges will expand opportunity, increase competitiveness, and build our manufacturing talent pool to address all of these critical gaps.

No single partner has the resources to effectively provide the needed level of training, the right curriculum, skills testing, and support to prospective and entry level employees. M-Powered, for example, would be overwhelmed and not

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Precision Metalforming Association Twin Cities District
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nearly as effective if it were only being driven by one or two leaders or organizations. The responsibility is manageable because it is shared.

Even with a successful partnership, accessing a trained pipeline of qualified workers is a challenge. Making progress truly requires ongoing cooperation and active leadership participation among employers, educators, funding sources/ economic development/ state agencies and nonprofit workforce intermediaries. Each partner has its own agenda; partners must understand and support each other’s goals and objectives before any real success will happen.

Kudos go to the partners that make M-Powered a model for workforce development; one that is spreading throughout Minnesota, and gathering nationwide attention.



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