

Plain Talk

Help Wanted

COLUMN BY ROB BUKSAR

I had a very large customer with a diverse management team comprised of people of two different generations. The older contingent was educated in the 60s and 70s when America was a different place. The younger, although nowhere near as experienced, made up for this with current “lean manufacturing” thinking and training in the latest technology.



You would like to think both of these groups could get together and reap the best from both worlds. Sadly, human nature and the lack of a good leader just wouldn't allow that to happen. As with any team minus a good coach, the situation ends up in glory-grabbing win/lose which seldom benefits anyone.

The older group enjoyed the control aspect of doing things in-house. Giving up “some” profitability seemed to be worth their peace of mind. The younger folks were clearly global marketers and willing to take greater risks for potential windfalls. Price sure seemed to be their only criterion. Whether or not the material consistently fit the bill was always a crapshoot, but was worth the risk if the price was right.

In the end, the youngsters won out and became the dominant influence in the company. Once that happened doing anything domestically just didn't make sense because it could be done so much cheaper in the Third World. Outsourcing became the name of the game.

The last nail in their coffin is when their product engineers decided to hook up directly with a Chinese manufacturing company. They sent over all their process info, bill of materials, lessons learned notebook, and every additional bit of info needed to produce their entire product line. Then the plan was just a matter of e-mailing their monthly production requirements and waiting for the boat to come in.

Guess what happened? The engineers of this brainstorm phased themselves right out of a career. Shortly after that, the company folded.

Does a move like this always fail? Of course not. It depends on what type of business you're in and what market you serve. In this case they gave up what they were and tried to become something they weren't—and paid for it with grave consequences.

Our greed and incredible shallow shortsightedness has empowered what is rapidly becoming our greatest global rival, Communist China, and they are not the good guys.

Natural resources are not limitless. When the demand continues to grow with a limited supply the price skyrockets. If you're wondering why you can't afford fuel and now metals, it's because there's another huge economy competing for the same supply and driving the price up.

Let me remind you that the origin of rebuilding was to be able to rebuild a customer's unit and charge them 60 percent of the new cost. Our present trade policies change everything.

It's no secret where I stand on this issue. I've always been a Midwestern guy brought up surrounded by factories and industry. Northwest Indiana has always been a little dusty because of the heavy industry, but it sure has been an exciting place to live because of all the money and activity.

Now there's nothing here but a rapidly fading memory of what once was.

America's ability to purchase consumer goods cheaper is the entire justification for our present trade deals. This may sound good on the surface, but it's only a half truth. There is an entire other side of this issue you need to be aware of before you determine what kind of deal we're really getting. The news media will not present both sides, so I recommend reading North Dakota Senator Byron L. Dorgan's recently published book, “Take This Job and Ship It.” (For more information see the press release on page 17 of this issue.)

This being an election month I want to encourage you to exercise your privilege to vote. I was reminded of that power by an ad printed in last month's *Hammond Times* newspaper. This ad was paid for by Stand Up For Steel, a coalition of the United Steelworkers, and America's major steel companies. It's printed on a full page and goes like this:

Help Wanted: Seeking a political candidate who will do something about the

44,900 manufacturing jobs American workers are losing every month. A candidate who will get our government to start enforcing the trade laws it refuses to enforce now, so we can stop countries like China, India, and Brazil from stealing American jobs. Send resume to: The Voters.

American manufacturing and rebuilding are in trouble. Let the candidates know if they don't have an answer, they don't have your vote.

May God bless America and wake the deluded among us.

Rob Buksar is owner of Hoosier Electric Co., Gary, Ind.