



## Employment trends meet talent crunch

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**As published in the *Calgary Herald*, Sunday, October 11, 2009**

The great recession of 2008-2009 highlighted two startling trends in the global economy. Both impact workers --from CEOs to entry-level employees and tomorrow's recruits.

The possibility of the first trend frightened the father of cybernetics, Norbert Wiener (1894 -1964), long before the current reality hit. An American child prodigy, he graduated from high school at 11, was awarded a BA in mathematics at 14 and received his PhD from Harvard at a mere 18. His dissertation was on mathematical logic. During the Second World War, he applied this logic to automate the aiming and firing of anti-aircraft guns.

Afterwards, Wiener gloomily predicted the high-tech world he and his colleagues were inventing would "undoubtedly lead to factories without employees . . . and the unemployment produced by such plants could only be disastrous."

While the United Auto Workers understood that automation would shrink the ranks of the unskilled labour force, they failed to grasp the single-minded determination CEOs and managers had to replace workers with machines --the core dynamic of automation. Not only did these actions reduce labour costs but also increased quality, making customers happy and boosted profit margins, benefiting shareholders.

Then one day there were too many cars. North America was left with Saturn and Pontiac's eerily silent assembly lines and hundreds of thousands of unemployed wage earners. GM had filed for bankruptcy.

Moms and dads who had urged their children to train for these previously high-paying, assembly-line jobs were suddenly wrong. And math-wizard Wiener was right, there would be serious consequences to local communities, suppliers, small businesses and, especially, people's lives.

Automation eliminated those positions. Many others were purged by the second global trend, which quietly gained steam during the past decade--outsourcing.

To save the costs of workforce salaries and sweeten bottom lines, CEOs of manufacturing companies discovered they could produce their goods cheaper overseas. Those positions departed. Next, call centres were located abroad, followed by information technology and business process services.

Abruptly, North Americans found educated workers abroad were performing tasks their neighbours previously did.

Outsourcing, predicts American writer Daniel Pink, will gain momentum. "Left-brained work--legal, accounting, computer programming-- can and will be done more inexpensively in developing nations (especially in China and India)."

As traditional assignments disappear, parents and guidance counsellors need to assist young people to make wise career choices. Outplacement groups want the same for their unemployed clients.



The Calgary Chamber of Commerce and the Talent Pool Development Society are jointly hosting their annual Career Show (Oct. 30 and 31 at the BMO Centre) to connect chamber members, other Calgary businesses, industry associations and educators looking to provide career information and possibly hire talented entry-level and experienced professionals

interested in job opportunities. The current economic downturn offers an excellent chance for Calgarians to prepare for the jobs of the future.

Julie Ball, the Talent Pool's executive director and manager of the Career Show, reports the show targets, among

others, high school and university students. "We want attendees to discover interesting and exciting jobs they might want to pursue after taking their post-secondary courses and training." The show also supports under-represented groups of talent--mature workers, aboriginals, people with disabilities, immigrants and youth--to become valuable contributors to their families and the economy.

"The show was originally launched to help the business community deal with the 13-year labour shortage Calgary endured," Ball states. "Today's show focuses on employers who will need to attract and retain gifted workers capable of giving those companies a real competitive advantage. That's an issue for the CEO, the executive team and line management."

Calgary companies need astute human resource strategies to ensure they attract the best and brightest to their organizations. "Create a strong employer brand to attract ideal talent," Ball says, "plan ahead to map out your strategic advantage, invest in your current workforce and train your exceptional workers to run the business tomorrow."

So what careers should parents encourage their children to choose, whether high-school aged or adult offspring who have moved home to weather the recession? Manpower states the top 10 jobs Canadian employers are trying to fill are: skilled trades, sales representatives, engineers, technicians, secretaries and administrative assistants, teachers, drivers, accounting and finance, labourers and nurses. Interesting since the global talent shortage is exactly the same in the first four and differs in the order of the last six (managers and executives, followed by accounting and finance, labourers, production operators, secretaries and administrative assistants, and drivers).

Pink believes Canadian and American companies need to concentrate on right-brained assignments --research, development, design, marketing and sales, global supply chain management-- to survive and thrive. "Right-brain abilities are those creative and big-picture thinking skills that can never be reduced to a formula," he reports. "Businesses need right-brained thinkers who can think up products and ideas, like the Apple iPod, that we didn't even know we needed."

As comedian Sid Caesar used to say, "The guy who invented the first wheel was an idiot. The guy that invented the other three, now he was a genius."

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