

Point of View

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The Time for Action is Now

Bob Berger is President and CEO of MW Canada in Cambridge, Ontario.



The textile industry is a very different world than it was when MW Canada started operations more than forty years ago. As manufacturers of textiles, we are facing unprecedented change; being challenged like never before. The only certainty is that tomorrow's workplace will be significantly altered from what it is today. These changes are likely to affect every process and machine we use.

We have to be ready.

At MW Canada, workplace training has become critical to our future. The training methods available to us will continue to grow as further technological advancements are made. Brick and mortar schools may very well become a thing of the past as web-based education becomes more accessible and user-friendly.

Few candidates arrive on our doorstep proficient in textiles or with a great deal of experience in the industry. It has become essential that we upgrade the knowledge, skills and ability of our current employees. These employees are the same people who already know the culture, people and processes. They have committed themselves to the organization and share a stake in our future. Making computer-based training (programmed instruction and self-paced learning) available onsite to current employees increases the likelihood of active employee participation. It is within our power to provide this to our employees.

MW Canada has taken the approach that training is a shared responsibility. We have recently invested in an ER (Education Room), our version of the Skills and Learning Site developed with the **Textiles Human Resources Council**. The ER includes classroom learning as well as e-learning. The portal is an integral part of the process. In addition to policy and procedure training, employees are offered two hours of paid training a month to build the core competencies required to be successful in this ever changing industry. Employees are encouraged to make use of the ER on their own time as well. In order to guide this process, we have hired a full-time Human Resources Manager to develop and facilitate the training.

Up until now, training has largely been based on company and departmental goals but, a year from now, when the individual assessments are complete, we hope to have learning plans based on the needs and learning capacity of each person. As our training efforts get off the ground, I expect to offer additional incentives to employees who are making progress toward their training goals.

This shared responsibility and commitment to the training process is being demonstrated by six employees who have signed up to complete their General Educational Development (high school equivalency). The six employees range in age from their early thirties to mid-forties. This pledge to complete their GED testing came from their desire to meet a personal goal. Already, we are seeing fantastic results. This kind of demand-driven training is creating workplace champions and providing individuals with a sense of accomplishment, creating a more engaged workforce. These processes are not without their challenges. We must keep in mind that innovative processes are a direct result of dedicated skills development. Our ability to be innovative will be the deciding factor on whether or not we continue to be viable contributors to the textile industry.

We are working closely with other textile companies in the area such as **Barrday, Firestone Textiles** and **Kraus Carpet Mills** to seek out best practices, uncover potential problems and share solutions. We have found that we are facing many of the same issues as our industry colleagues – these support networks are essential.

We do recognize that the system will not work for everyone and we probably will not see bottom-line results for three or four years, but planning for the future is the cost of doing business. If we don't plan, there will be nobody to blame but ourselves.

If you have a Point of View to share, please contact the Textiles Human Resources Council at info@thrc-crhit.org.