

“Reviving our Economy: The Role of Higher Education in Job Growth and Development”

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Let me start by acknowledging how honored I am to be asked to offer testimony before this Committee on Education and the Workforce. I am Jeff Aleson, Vice President of Strategic Planning for Diamond Manufacturing Company. Along with performing the strategic planning duties at Diamond, my current position allows me to lead the Dependable Punch and Fabricating Divisions as well as the Engineering, Quality, Production Control and Shipping/Receiving Departments.

Diamond Manufacturing Company is a manufacturer of specially engineered perforated materials with locations in Wyoming Pennsylvania., Michigan City Indiana., Cedar Hill Texas and Charlotte North Carolina. The facility in Wyoming houses a 125,000 square foot manufacturing facility as well as the 40,000 square foot corporate offices. The Michigan City and Cedar Hill facilities add a combined 180,000 square feet of manufacturing. We also have a 20,000 square foot distribution warehouse in Charlotte. Diamond was founded in 1915 to service the coal industry. Today it serves in excess of 25 different industry groups. Diamond has been a pioneer in developing new applications and expanding into markets such as power generation, petrochemical processing, agriculture processing and highway sound barriers. It also serves the automotive, appliance and computer markets. 2011 combined sales will be in excess of 100 million dollars and growing.

Diamond has experienced continuous growth during the last several years. The key to maintaining this growth is our ability to react quickly to potential opportunities while having documented, yet flexible systems in place to maintain organizational stability. We have in recent years hired a number of graduates in both the technical and nontechnical areas to sustain this growth. We also heavily utilize the local university internship programs, with three currently on staff. Current growth will facilitate the hiring of personnel both at the local facility, as well as our branch plants.

I agree that higher education plays an important role in Job Growth and Development. While it is important that today's graduates be technically competent in their field, I feel it is equally important that they be competent in the areas of communication and problem solving.

Companies in today's competitive environment live or die by their ability to communicate effectively. Efficient communication is critical both externally and just as importantly, internally. We need the skills to be able to understand our customers' requirements and convey them accurately within the organization. Technology has allowed us to communicate faster than we ever thought possible. Not

only the speed at which we can communicate but the sheer amount of information that can be transferred in a millisecond is staggering. But all these different means and increased speed have not necessarily allowed us to be more effective. It has not increased our ability to listen and to understand.

One of the hardest skills to master is the art of listening and truly understanding what is being said, this often requires the ability to read between the lines. In doing so this will help decrease any misperceptions and enhance true effective communication. Many times there is a psychology behind what is being said. It is important to understand a person's viewpoint. The better we understand this the better we can communicate.

In addition to effective communication, problem solving skills allow for the efficient utilization of a company's resources. Today's companies are required to be able to do more with less to remain competitive. We are always searching for continuous improvement in all our processes. Effective problem solving skills allow companies to capitalize on new challenges as they are presented.

Having employees with an understanding of how companies function and interact internally aids in the ability to problem solve. Having the skills to find the root cause of a problem goes a long way in finding a solution or potential improvement. The goal is to look at the company as a whole, not just a sum of the individual parts. In doing so, we have the opportunity to become a lean and competitive organization on the global stage.

In conclusion, I feel the key to job growth and development is a company's ability to react to ever changing paradigms. Our employees need the skills to react quickly and accurately. Effective communication and problem solving skills are powerful tools to have in one's tool box.