

Can 2010 Be Prosperous Without Manufacturing?

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As January rolls around each year, we tend to make resolutions with every intention on keeping them. By February, however, most have faded away.

But if we want manufacturing to emerge from what some call a “Depression,” and support the nation’s economic recovery, then we need to go beyond the annual New Year’s resolutions, and set a number of things into action.

Recent activity from the White House is encouraging — the naming of Ron Bloom as senior counselor on manufacturing policy, and top manufacturers meeting with the President. In addition, the recent release of [A Framework for Revitalizing American Manufacturing](#) [1] indicates the rising importance of manufacturing.

However, if we are to have a prosperous and more hopeful 2010, manufacturing must be on the forefront of economic discussions — not just inside the Beltway, but across the country.

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Five resolutions for getting back to making things:

America — and Americans — should resolve to:

1. Change the manufacturing discussion to one that focuses on looking forward rather than backwards. Let's move beyond the loss of repetitive assembly-line jobs, to helping the nation understand that the U.S. manufacturing sector continues to be the world's largest, and by itself, represents the 9th largest economy in the world.
2. Explain how manufacturing is in a transformative period, where productivity is increasing rapidly, and requires a highly trained workforce. Emphasize that the industrial sector offers societal benefits from creating wealth through research, innovation, and product development, which result in higher paying jobs.
3. Find ways to open up lines of credit to small- and medium-sized manufacturers. Otherwise, manufacturers who survived the recession may find themselves failing during the recovery and costing the nation even more manufacturing jobs. Many of these companies are receiving purchase orders, but are struggling to find the capital to invest in the equipment and workers they need to sustain them through the development process.
4. Equip laid-off manufacturing practitioners with 21st-century skills. Even though there's been a loss of 5 million manufacturing jobs in the past decade, a recent survey revealed that one-third of manufacturers still can't find qualified, high-skilled employees for the jobs that are available. Let's get these people retrained so they can respond to change and become a more agile workforce.
5. Develop a self-sustaining energy policy. While it's great to see the support of alternative energy initiatives, we cannot count on one energy sector to support all our needs. The U.S. needs to evaluate all the sectors — from wind, solar, geo-thermal and nuclear, to the traditional oil and gas — so that industry can figure out innovative ways to fill in the gaps.

To ensure a prosperous New Year — and new decade — U.S. manufacturing must be at the center of our economic recovery, or we run the risk that it plays out like a well-intended New Year's resolution: an idea without a well thought out plan.

The [Society of Manufacturing Engineers \[2\]](#) is a global organization devoted to the needs of professional manufacturing engineers. Visit them online at www.sme.org [3].

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