

AMERICAN ENGINEER™

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The "DFENS" Myth Falls Down

The shortage shouters have been frantically devising new myths in a desperate effort to prop up the engineering-shortage myth, in the face of an abysmal job market. One prop is the myth that there is a critical "shortage" of new, non-Hispanic white male workers, the so-called "traditional" source of new engineers. This myth holds that these workers have become an insignificant portion of new workforce entrants, whereas in reality they are expected to be a whopping 32 percent of new workforce entrants in the period 1990-2005.

Another prop is the "wave-of-retirements" myth, which ignores the following facts: (1) engineers of retirement age came from graduating classes of much smaller average size than those of recent years, and (2) those engineers' numbers have been slashed even further by years of age discrimination and the discouragement of salary compression and inversion.

Finally, there is the "Shortage-of-good-engineers" myth, which includes the myth of the "defense" engineer. Stereotypical "defense" engineers, according to the myth (and the same stereotype applies to engineers who have done non-defense work with government contractors), have incurable flaws that render them unemployable and untrainable in the area of commercial work: They cannot keep costs down. They cannot meet fast-paced development schedules. They are overspecialized. They are unfamiliar with commercial technologies. They cannot understand commercial markets. They expect too much pay. They consider commercial work boring. They are squares with crew cuts and plastic pocket protectors, like the

engineer with the personalized (DFENS) license plate in the movie, "Falling Down." Etc., etc., etc. Never mind that a few years ago there was much bellyaching that the lure of the defense industry was supposedly "depriving" commercial industry of the best engineers. These alleged afflictions of defense engineers supposedly stem from a peculiar "culture" of the defense industry.

However, this "culture" was debunked as a myth in a *Technology Review* magazine article (April '95, page 52) titled, "The Myth of the Specialized Military Contractor." This article, written by Maryellen A. Kelley and Todd A. Watkins, states, "... our research indicates that the image of a few highly specialized defense contractors occupying an enclave walled off from commercial manufacturing is largely a myth ... we found that the vast majority of defense contractors serve both military and civilian customers. What's more, strengths developed under the umbrella of national security are being tapped to benefit firms' commercial work, and vice-versa ... our 1991 survey revealed that most companies in the MDG ["machining-intensive durable goods"] sector in fact make commercial and defense products on the same machinery with the same people ... many of the features thought to be peculiar to the defense contracting relationship—low volumes, custom orders, a high degree of dependence on a few customers, and a small number of rivals—apply just as strongly to commercial work ... firms that do defense work are way ahead of the curve in applying information technology to manufacturing.

The Dissident Engineer

Editor's Column

JOBS FOR ENGINEERS - INFORMAL AEA SURVEY

One of the periodicals I subscribe to is *Electronic Engineering Times*. It contains engineering job ads and informative articles, some with technical content, others with professional content. Two recent issues were notable, because they contained so many job ads for technical professionals. The June 26 issue had 18 full pages of job ads; the July 10 issue had 12 full pages. Is the long recession finally over for U.S. engineers? I'd like to know the experiences of our readers since 1993. Write me at my P.O. Box, and tell me about your success (or lack of it) in landing a job and holding it. Tell me if you've been unemployed during the past two years. I'll publish the data. If you want your comments to be quoted, say so. Then let me know if I can mention your name.

SKUNK WORKS (PROPRIETARY PHRASE USED BY LOCKHEED)

I was pleasantly surprised to receive mail about the "Skunk Works" article, which originally appeared in the 3/20/95 issue of *Electronic Design (ED)* and was reprinted in the June '95 issue of *AE*. I'm including this mail in the *READER'S VOICE* column. The May 15, 1995 issue of *ED*, for which I didn't request reprint

permission, contained another article by the same author, John Trudel, entitled "??????" It told how the name 'Skunk Works' originally came from Al Capp's *L'il Abner* comic strip, (After Big Barnsmell's Skonk Works, where the bootleg Kickapoo Joy Juice was brewed). A Lockheed engineer named Kelly Johnson appropriated "skonkworks" in the '40s. Mr. Capp objected, so the name was changed to Skunk Works."

When Mr. Trudel's column began to attract attention, *ED* tried an experiment. They removed his picture from his column and replaced it with a picture of a skunk sitting at a PC. A Lockheed lawyer objected, saying that the skunk in the picture had too great a resemblance to the Lockheed skunk works logo. This is despite the fact that the Lockheed skunk was a front view, while Trudel's skunk was a rear view. Later Mr. Trudel received another letter from a Lockheed lawyer, saying that the term 'skunk works' was a Lockheed corporate asset. This letter included an ample bill for the lawyer's time, which explains why the titles of Trudel's May and June columns were changed to "??????" Mr. Trudel requested suggestions for new names for his column about innovative corporate uses of technology talent. Meanwhile I've obtained permission to reprint his June article, which appears in this edition of *AE*.

(Continued)

(Editor's Column Continued)

"HAVE SKILLS, WILL TRAVEL - HOMEBOUND"

is the title of a *Business Week* article that a reader sent me. It contained no indication of the date of issue, but was sub-titled "21ST CENTURY CAPITALISM." The article told how numerous foreign students, particularly those from the Pacific rim, acquire technological U.S. doctorates, with an eye to a rewarding career in the U.S. Some of them obtain well-paid positions, often at the expense of a U.S. applicant, and AEA has complained long and hard about such displacement of U.S. talent. Other foreign-born PhD's choose a different path to success and return home—to start a high tech business that competes with our own industries. This puts the squeeze not only on U.S. individual talent, but also on corporate America. I don't know exactly what is the solution to the problem of U.S. schools generating competition for individual jobs and U.S. corporations. I do know that the U.S. education industry answers to its own bottom line. Perhaps our readers can suggest what ought to be done, if in fact there is any solution to the problem. AEA seeks to enhance the status of the U.S. engineering profession and U.S. engineering capabilities (the well-being of the nation itself). What do you think should be done?

"JUDGE EXTENDS RESTRAINT AGAINST 187"

is the title of an article from the 3/95 issue of *Border Watch*, a publication of the American Immigration Control Foundation (AICF). This article in *Border Watch* is situated right under the cartoon "SILENCE PEASANT." The cartoon is reprinted in this issue of AE. We haven't reprinted the article, but it states in part, "U.S. District Judge Mariana Pfaltzer blocked most key provisions of California's Prop. 187, after California voters overwhelmingly passed the measure in November to cut public benefits to illegal aliens. This ruling could tie up 187 for months or even years. Pro-alien activists hope court action eventually will defeat or water down the initiative. In response to Judge Pfaltzer's ruling California Gov. Pete Wilson affirmed, 'I will not tolerate this. The voters of California will not tolerate this.' In January Pfaltzer handed down an additional ruling which required that state employees receive written notice not to enforce 187 until the courts make their final decisions. Spokesmen for pro-alien groups called this ruling a victory because it would help ensure that illegal aliens, for the time being, would not lose any of the benefits they receive."

ILLUSORY JOB ADS

Here's another job ad, which has narrow specifications and extensive requirements that comprise a biography of the intended applicant. The salary offered is sub-standard, even for applicants with only one year experience, and the employer's name is omitted, being replaced by the name of a State Employment agency. All of this points to the exclusion of U.S. applicants and acceptance of an alien, who is already on the company payroll as a temp employee. Consider complaining to Secretary of Labor, Robert Reich at the U.S. Labor Department, 200 Constitution Avenue, Washington, DC 20010, or to the person whose name appears at the bottom of the ad. Tell them what you think of this transparent tactic to recruit aliens as project managers at \$34.2K/annum.

Project Manager - Duties: Project management in development of bar code scanning, printing and inventory control software. Perform feasibility studies through rapid software prototyping. Design software using modern software engineering techniques such as object oriented design and software, graphics, and user interface standards. Discuss enhancements with customers and testers. Evaluate software development tools. Supervise team members, evaluate and assess performance, consult with team members, integrate project development results from team members into software project. Debug and test software

implementations using and complying with configuration management procedures. Requirements: Bachelor of Science Degree in Computer Science. One year of commercial software development experience including entire lifecycle. Education, training and/or experience must include data structure and algorithms; software development process with Graphic User Interface Design; StarView Multiplatform Library; bar code reading and printing algorithms; C++; detailed level programming in Windows, Windows NT; ROM BIOS data structure; Unix scripts and shell; MAC; object oriented programming; and C++ compilers. Terms: Full time. \$34,200.00. 8:30a.m. to 5:00p.m. Reply by resume to: Ms. Redington, Utah Department of Employment Security, E.S. Staff Services, 5th Floor, 140 E. 300S., SLC, Utah 84111. Refer to job order number 3060033.

LETTER ABOUT JIM WILLIAMS

A letter about Jim Williams, reprinted from *EDN* magazine, appears in this issue of AE. Jim Williams is a high-level engineer at Linear Technology Corporation, which produces sophisticated integrated circuits. I regard him as one of the genuine wizards in electronics. However I'm aware of his love for the field, which is great enough, that he apparently places less separation between his life and his profession than most other engineers. The author of the letter is a man whose writing skill I have encountered elsewhere, and this letter displays his talent. He takes Mr. Williams' attitude to task. What's your view on a salaried engineer so in love with his work that he uses a home lab to advance his career at the office? Do present-day engineers in the U.S. need to emulate this behavior in order to survive? Is there such a thing as too much dedication? Also should an outstandingly-creative engineer work only for himself?

"PUBLIC ENEMY?"

is the title of a Brian Santo article, reprinted in this issue from *EE Times*. The topic—transmission of pornography on telecommunications media and legislative efforts to stop it—is not at the top of a struggling engineer's agenda. However I reprint it anyway to inform readers of the issues surrounding the use of telecommunications. Tell me what you think about Mr. Santo's position and the issue of pornography on Internet (if in fact there is pornography on the 'NET).
Robert Bruce, AE Editor

From FAIR And The Arizona Republic

In a small border town in Arizona, there are 8,100 postal boxes receiving mail ...

... Yet the town has only 4000 residents.

Around the first of every month, these mailboxes are brimming with U.S. Government checks. And the people who are collecting these checks? They come across the border from Mexico where they live.

This quiet town of San Luis is on the Arizona-Mexico border just south of the Colorado River.

Each month, Josefina Rodriguez, the town's vice mayor and postmistress sorts thousands of envelopes containing welfare checks, unemployment checks and food stamps. This past month, the post office also sorted more than 13,500 income tax refunds—virtually all fraudulent.

Many of these post boxes have 10 to 15 people using them. There is just no way to calculate the magnitude of the fraud being perpetrated against our government ...

... no way of knowing how many tax dollars are going to support Mexican citizens across the border—just from this one Arizona town alone ...

How many other towns like San Luis are there along our unprotected border?

("From FAIR..." Continued)

They are an *irresistible lure* to many foreigners who have no qualms about breaking U.S. laws to help themselves to our out-of-control welfare system.

The word is being passed back home by wave after wave of immigrants—that *the United States is an easy target for fraud*. And the message is spreading far and wide that those who come here will be given housing, food, medical care, education and retirement benefits.

In recent testimony before Congress, it was revealed that *non-citizens account for fully 45% of the more than \$7 BILLION* spent annually in the Supplemental Security Income program created for our own elderly.

In fact, as the number of elderly American citizens needing this program **DROPPED BY 25%** over the past ten years, the number of *immigrants using the program QUADRUPLED!*

The government's own General Accounting Office tells us that legal immigrants in this country are twice as likely as American citizens to be living below the poverty level and receiving welfare benefits.

At the current level of immigration, this country is essentially *importing 290,000 potential welfare recipients each year*—not including the cost of welfare and welfare fraud committed by illegal aliens.

A welfare bill that will cut off benefits to many noncitizens has already passed the House and gone through committee in the Senate. This vote will be coming to the Senate floor very shortly.

(Reprinted from a news release of the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR) that originally appeared in the Apr. 9, 1995 edition of the "Arizona Republic."

Reader's Voice

This column in the "American Engineer" is for readers to voice an opinion about issues that affect the professional life of an engineer or other technical professional. Readers are encouraged to write AEA with their professional concerns. Each submission should include the name, address and phone number of the writer. Except for short excerpts, we'll publish the writer's name, city and state (unless the writer requests anonymity). In that case, we'll publish initials, city and state. Let's hear from you.

From M. Gottlieb of El Sobrante, CA: - I've probably read most of LF's published comments and have found myself to be in agreement with most of what he has to say. The June issue is no exception, and I complement his writing style and his thoughts. I wish he/she would offer more positive suggestions. With regard to LF's current comments, I offer this suggestion. Change our professional titles in the following way. Acceptable titles are Engineer, Physicist, Chemist, Mathematician, Electrical Engineer, Mechanical Engineer, Civil Engineer, Mining Engineer and Chemical Engineer. Note especially the absence of Computer Engineer and Computer Scientist. These titles come out of the mathematics or physics departments. (I never heard of anyone being called a "slide-rule engineer.") So I'd like to see them replaced by Mathematician or Physicist. I could have listed 22 titles to go to a permanent grave, but I didn't. Note the titles junior- and senior-engineer. They would irritate my physician and attorney [if they were called junior-physician or junior-attorney]. And we should do something about train engineer and operating engineer.

From L. Griffith of Lancaster, CA: Just read your June '95 issue of *American Engineer*, in which you asked "What's a 'skunk works' (SW)?" Here's my take on the topic. An SW consists of a small team of multi-disciplinary individuals focused on achieving a well-defined,

real-world goal in an environment free of bureaucratic and managerial power and control. Reason, Reality and Logic rule. Proof is by demonstration and logical analysis based on philosophically and scientifically validated principles. Decision is based on such proof. Authority in all its forms is actively challenged. Random edicts and commands are rejected and ignored for the noise that they are.

The results are spectacular. The almost impossible is done in times so short that calendars are too coarse to measure them. Productivity is hundreds of times greater than normally thought possible. The reason is that individuals with minds capable of creating and producing are free to function in the Real World. Their efforts are not diluted by the mindless and unproductive demands of accountants who think that manipulating paper money creates value. Their time is not wasted by the unproductive intrusion of managers who think that wealth is created by making snap decisions out of context. In other words, they are free to think, act, create and produce. Why is it there are so few SW's? Existing organizations are designed simply to continue to exist. Change is perceived as a threat to that existence. Thus structures, policies, plans, decisions and organizational cultures are carefully constructed to inhibit change. My answer is to provide my services only to the situations that approximate an SW. I am a regular contributor to *Short Circuit*, the Newsletter for the Empowered Engineer.

Editor: This letter is condensed for reasons of space. However the writer's philosophy comes through loud and clear. In several places, I use the phrase 'SW' in place of S.... W...., because Lockheed contends that S.... W.... is a Lockheed proprietary phrase.

From L.F. of L.A.: The British car industry is a good illustration of the fact that in today's high-tech world, a national industry can quickly decline to a point of no return, after which it is virtually impossible to completely restore that industry to its former strength. An article titled, "The British Car Is Dead — Long Live the British Car," in the British magazine *Management Today* stated, "The UK has become technologically subservient ... Britain may soon have no intellectual property in automotive technology except for its renowned expertise in design consultancy and in the rarified field of Formula One racing ... Both Rover and Ford have R&D facilities here. But both are more likely to dwindle than to expand ... The Japanese do almost all their research, development and engineering at home in Japan. GM Europe's engineering effort is focused on Rensselaers in Germany. Peugeot does it in France. Does that matter? Not in the sense that it imperils thousands of jobs. Or that it will cause a vast profit outflow. Ford and GM have been remitting dividends to America for decades in the good years, and they still have been making big investments in Britain. Yet the loss of indigenous R&D capability must erode the fabric of Britain's industrial base. R&D is where the greatest value is added, where the intellectual property resides, where the mainspring of growth is to be found ... Without a strong R&D base, the roots of Britain's car manufacturing revival will be shallow ... Beggars cannot be choosers. Britain's motor industry was reduced to near-penury by more than 30 post-war years of complacent management, destructive trade unions, and ignorant governments ... Thanks to the Thatcher governments, with their labor relations reforms and promotion of investment by Japanese car makers, Britain took the only route it could. It recreated an industry. The industry's form was not ideal, but in the appalling circumstances, it was the best that could be done." Some of the same destructive trends that wrecked the British car industry are acting upon many American industries, including the American car industry.

Robert Bruce, AE Editor
Box 620726, Little Neck, NY 11362

SILENCE, PEASANT!!



Dick Hofer FOR BORDERWATCH

C'MON!
ADMIT IT!
I NEVER TREATED
YOU THAT BADLY!



KING GEORGE U.S.

(Reprinted with permission from the March '95 issue of "Border Watch," a publication of the American Immigration Control Foundation (AICF).)

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??????

We all know about compressed cycle times, savage global competition and the need for customer focus, excellence, and innovation. The old industrial-age management methods often do more harm to workers than good.

It's easy to see how business suffers from fundamentally dumb-minded mistakes amongst this chaos. A Lockheed lawyer's objection to our use of the comic strip-based skunk works name is one particular case in point.

Firms tend to focus on anything that diverts attention from bad news, especially by creating an artificial crisis. When a crisis is solved, a manager becomes a hero.

Perhaps a Lockheed manager will be promoted because the risk of a purchasing agent buying military airplanes from *Electronic Design* has been eliminated. Their lawyer is happy because he can assert his alleged 1943-era "rights" against dictionaries and other firms to generate billable hours.

But Lockheed's core problem is that our government is not buying new weapons. The top 12 defense contractors now have a total market value of \$45 billion. Few firms make successful transitions from government work to commercial products. Failure rate is about 80-90%.

One example of dumb-mindedness is the "disconnect," where the product is designed and ready for production before people start worrying about the market or business aspects (e.g. PCjr and Edsel). Sometimes firms fail because what the brand promises is clever science fiction (a Newton MessagePad that recognizes handwriting). It's crucial to sort things out at the concept state.

Implementing a fully cross-functional team at the concept phase is key. You need an empowered leader, a technologist, a market guru, and a production expert. You may also need seasoned "outsiders." Most firms regularly use consultants during the development of new products.

Engineers generally want to focus on engineering. It's difficult to cross functional boundaries. Turf wars and hidden agendas are common. Empowered cross-functional teams require leadership along with other important skills that are lacking in most firms.

Most machine-age managers still don't get it. I saw a video of a vice-president of engineering of a large firm talking about customer focus, declining prices, Japanese manufacturing, and Hewlett-Packard's improved cycle times. He said his downsized, overworked, fearful engineers should take risks, change, and work harder. He didn't mention that moving to world-class performance takes many years of diligent work and dedicated talent.

Change requires a parallel effort. A friend likens it to old-time automobile races where the crew consisted of a driver and a mechanic who tuned the car during the race. Corporate change takes process tuning, top-level support, outside coaches, and dedicated resources. Pretending that engineers can do management's job in their spare time is dumb-minded.

John D. Trudel, CMC

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Jim Williams' features continue to draw reader response

Jim Williams' article "Be it ever so high-tech, there's no place like home" (*EDN*, Jan 5, 1995, pg 103) and Dennis Feucht's letter in "Signals & Noise" (March 16, 1995, pg 25) should have unequivocally stated that creative engineers who can develop state-of-the-art hardware or software on their own should work primarily for themselves. The home lab should never become a permanent extension of the workday job experience, nor should its fruits be freely given to employers with whom the engineer has no equity position.

Feucht has apparently come to this reality via the backdoor, now that mainstream technology companies are no longer interested in taking advantage of him. However, Williams is seriously short-changing himself under what I call the "work-is-its-own-reward" theory of career management. Time spent as an employee should not be squandered exchanging excellent and (perhaps) patentable ideas for a paycheck and a pat on the back.

Hasn't Williams looked around and noticed few (if any) engineers aged 50 or 60 working alongside him at the office? Departure from the job (coerced or otherwise) is not all bad—if it is expected or planned. Engineers, though groomed to serve as employees, should grab control of their intellectual property. Although quality advice on this subject is extremely scarce, a good deal on a 1964 Tektronix oscilloscope is no workaround for anger, denial, and today's wonder euphemism, the "involuntary career change."

Don Mennie, Technical Writer
Mendham, NJ

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Public Enemy?

The contention in the United States that the government is the enemy has remained current for over a generation; 30 years ago coming mostly from the left, now spurred predominantly from the right. Yet, despite the flaws in our system, it remains the best government anybody has yet devised.

Governments can and have become oppressive, and the drafters of the U.S. Constitution and Bill of Rights understood that well. They constructed those documents to provide a sophisticated structure of checks and balances that helps guard against severe governmental abuses. As a result, despite a history of Constitutional transgressions, the U.S. government has never been as oppressive as some of its more strident detractors have claimed, and as long as those two documents are valid, it never will be.

With astonishing rapidity, however, the Constitution is being invalidated by a Congress and a Supreme Court more concerned with quick fixes to difficult problems than with protecting the principles that make the United States the unique place it is.

The war on drugs has been pitifully ineffective except for two astounding accomplishments: the gutting of the Fourth and Fifth Amendments. Government agents now only have to claim "good faith" to justify searches for and seizures of evidence of crime. There are now circumstances under which a government can seize property without compensating the owners for a loss.

Less than two weeks ago, the war against child pornography started stalking its first victim—the First Amendment. A whopping 84 out of 100 senators voted to include the Exon bill in the telecommunications-overhaul package that has been winding through Congress. The bill would make it illegal to transmit child pornography, but it would also make it a crime to make, create, solicit or initiate

transmission of "any comment, request, suggestion, proposal, image, or any other communication that is obscene, lewd, lascivious, filthy or indecent, with intent to annoy, abuse, threaten or harass another person ..."

Indecency and lewdness and filth are in the eye of the beholder—a legal principle called "community standards." But today's communications systems are international, not local. So, the most extremely sensitive community, armed with this bill, will be able to hold the rest of the United States hostage to its standards. Anybody who finds nudity indecent will make it impossible to post a graphic of some of Rubens' paintings or text of a D.H. Lawrence novel. Is that alarmist? I don't think so. Every week, some American somewhere in the United States is thoughtlessly banning some book or another.

(The Exon bill will also attempt to regulate international trafficking of this material—raising the specter of the appointment of a governmental-censoring agency that must decide either to block or allow access to every foreign computer site.)

Because this bill threatens a fundamental principle of the United States, I truly believe that this bill is more obscene, lewd and indecent than anything posted to the Internet by *Penthouse* magazine, but since Americans seem to love demagoguery such as Exon's, I fear the argument is going nowhere.

Let's try just being practical: Laws against child pornography already exist. Let's use them.

Brian Santo

bsanto@eet.cmp.com and on CompuServe: 70212,41

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