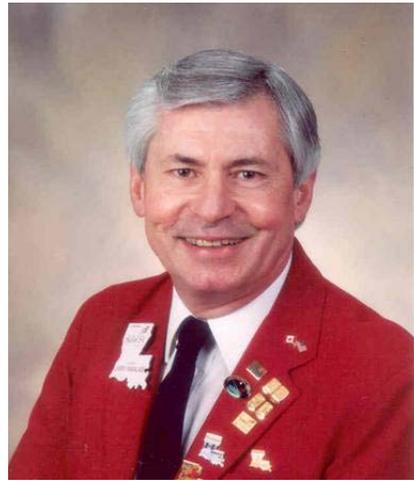


# The Importance of Career and Technical Education



## Problem Statement:

Without a quality Career and technical education system, this nation will not be able to compete in a global marketplace. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics:

- 18 of the 20 fastest growing occupations within the next decade require Career-technical education.

Former Labor Secretary Robert Reich defines global competitiveness as the nation's ability to add value to goods and services in an increasingly integrated world economy. Our ability to compete will determine the living standard of our people. Already we are seeing a widening gap between our richest and poorest citizens. The solution, Reich says, is to equip more people with skills through less-than-four-year college programs. Many experts believe that our current education process fails, at least partially, because it forces students of all interests and abilities into college preparatory programs contributing to critical shortages of skilled workers.

The shortage of qualified skilled workers has reached acute proportions in nearly every sector of American industry. Asian, South American and European countries place a much higher cultural and governmental value on the achievement of trade skills. In contrast, the skilled labor pool has become dangerously shallow in the U.S. The shrinkage of a quality skilled labor force in America accelerates the erosion of our manufacturing base and crimps the growth of many companies dependent on technical workers.

Employers increasingly cite deficiencies not only in up-to-date technical skills training of job applicants, but also in the "employability skills" creativity, problem-solving skills, teamwork, leadership, self-esteem and integrity that are indispensable to productivity in today's workplace.

Career-technical education is too critical to this nation's future to be a dumping ground for academic underachievers or "problem students." SkillsUSA is one of the leaders in upgrading the perception and the reality of quality in Career-technical education and, ultimately, in American workmanship. SkillsUSA instructors and advisors are people who step out front to make a positive difference in their profession and in the educational experience of their students. Studies show that employers prefer to hire these graduates because they need 20 percent less formal on-the-job training than those without Career education backgrounds. Nearly 50 percent of Career program graduates continue their education. These are students who love what they do, and who embrace life-long learning. The American public needs to understand the need for skilled workers and how they are trained.

In order to restore vitality in America's skilled work force, we need to find answers to the following questions.

- How do we keep public Career training programs current and relevant to industry needs?

- How can we upgrade the public perception of Career and technical education students?  
Of careers in the skilled trade professions?
- How can business and industry show support for the best career and technical programs and students in public education?
- How could we create a venue and an incentive for demonstrating top student performance?
- How can we provide a nationally prominent forum for education and business to interact and exchange ideas, to unite their respective cultures in driving quality to education and qualified skilled workers to American industries?
- How can business and industry effectively transmit to career and technical education educators the current standards of performance for entry-level skilled workers?

The American public needs to learn about, and understand, the need for skilled workers and how they're trained. SkillsUSA shows these training programs in a positive light.

We, as Americans, need to adopt a new attitude about work and jobs. Other nations value career and technical skills so much they have national policies, practices and programs to upgrade continuously the knowledge and skills of their workers. In America, by contrast, we discourage our youth from seeking careers in so-called blue-collar careers and insist that college education is essential for happiness and success in life, even though only 25 percent of the population ever receive college degrees.

We must help our youth choose satisfying jobs and encourage them to take extensive training and, in return, see that they are well rewarded.