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By Allan F. "Duffy" Gaynor



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Invest in workers to keep Chicago the city that works

"The city that works." The motto conjures up images of steel mills, factories, stockyards and packing houses — the type of labor that helped build Chicago into a world-class industrial city.

Eventually, however, those jobs began moving elsewhere or disappearing altogether, and with their departure came high unemployment, rising poverty and crime, and public schools that were deemed the worst in the nation. Clearly, our city wasn't working.

Today, the landscape of jobs and skills has changed dramatically. While manufacturing is still an important part of Chicago's economy, we've become much more diversified, moving beyond our rust-belt past to become a major center for finance, insurance, health care and technology.

As a result, Chicagoans today enjoy a higher quality of life, along with a much stronger economy. In fact, Chicago now boasts the third-largest gross metropolitan product in the nation — approximately \$422 billion, according to 2005 estimates.

So, how do we ensure that Chicago doesn't go back to the "bad old days" — and all the problems that came with them — in the 1970s and '80s?

The most important thing we can do to sustain our current momentum is to ensure Chicago maintains a modern workforce with the skills to compete in a global economy.

Much of the responsibility is on workers themselves, who must adapt continuously, developing new skills and learning entirely new fields while taking on greater responsibility for career development.

YOUR VIEW



Allan F. "Duffy" Gaynor is Chicago senior location executive for IBM Corp.

But the onus isn't just on them. It's also on business leaders.

Preparing people for well-paying jobs goes beyond high school and college. As employers, we need to understand that while we may no longer provide cradle-to-grave security, we must be

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willing to invest in the ongoing development and financial security of our employees.

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That means things like portable retirement savings, career transition assistance for

employees preparing for second or third careers in fields like education and community service, and ongoing opportunities for training and education.

That could include a matching account for learning, something IBM Corp. will begin offering this year, which works like a 401(k) and into which both employer and employee contribute.

The business community should also be working with area colleges and universities to develop and provide low-cost access to ongoing education in emerging career fields like service sciences.

These are good times for Chicago. If we can maintain our economic momentum and keep the quality of our workforce high, we can be a major player in the global economy — a worldwide model for a city that works.

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