

FIRSTPERSON

STEVEN L. BLUE | CEO | MILLER INGENUITY

You believe that manufacturing in the U.S. is poised for growth in the future. Can you explain?

It just got a lot better because President Trump has started to unravel some of these horrible trade deals that were made under previous administrations. However, if CEOs in the United States aren't preparing for resurgence in manufacturing, they are going to miss out. That demand that they can't capture is going to go somewhere. It's going to go offshore again. CEOs ought to be hiring now. CEOs ought to be training their workforces now. CEOs ought to be arranging for product flow and sourcing material. They may have only one shot at this. It's a fairly large window, but it won't stay open forever.

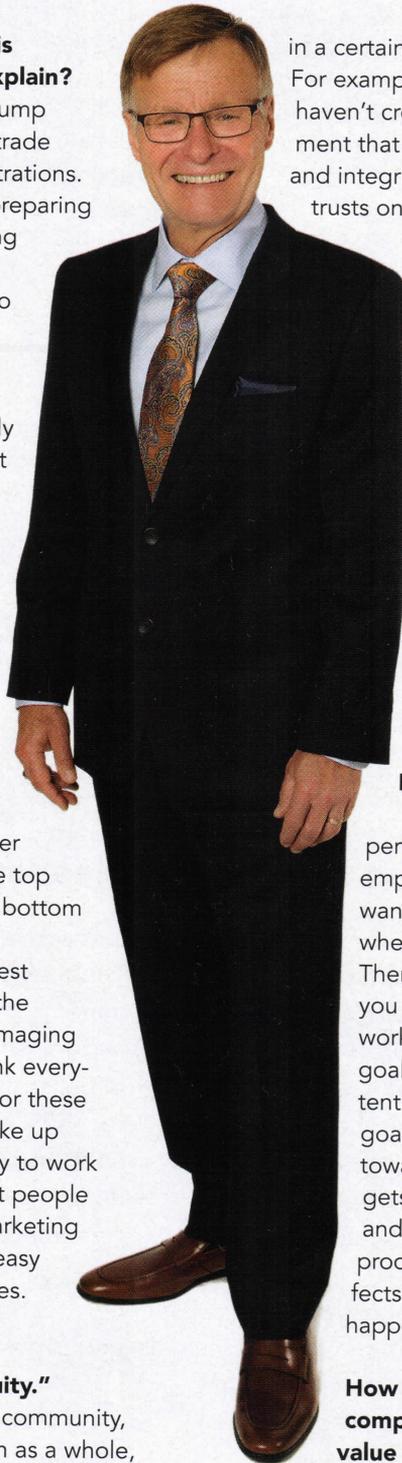
You have noted that the biggest threat to this resurgence in manufacturing will come "from the corner office of your own company." Why?

The biggest danger that exists is CEOs who think that machines are the answers to all of their problems. A robot has no initiative. A robot does not display any innovation. And a robot never suggests how an operation can be improved. The biggest danger CEOs present is in thinking the answer is at the top with machines when the answer is really at the bottom with employees.

The single biggest asset, or the single biggest threat, in any company is whoever is sitting in the corner office because they can do so many damaging things. They have a certain work ethic they think everyone should have too. They have no tolerance for these millennials who want a life. Well millennials make up about half the workforce these days. Find a way to work with them. Most CEOs don't want to talk about people skills, they want to talk about machines and marketing plans. It's easy to talk about machines. It's not easy to motivate an employee or group of employees. It's not easy to lead or inspire people.

Please describe the "Seven Values of Ingenuity."

The values are respect, integrity, teamwork, community, commitment, excellence, and innovation. Taken as a whole, the Seven Values of Ingenuity is a highly integrated system, and these values actually work for propelling a company and producing astonishing results. They harness the enthusiasm, ingenuity, and creativity of employees. They can create astonishing results if the values are implemented or installed



in a certain order and a certain sequence.

For example, you don't jump into teamwork if you haven't created a leadership team and an environment that has the first two values, which is respect and integrity. You can't have a team when no one trusts one another.

Tell us about building a culture by design and not default.

Most organizations today have cultures by default, not by design. Cultures by default are generally destructive. I tell CEOs that the model you want to have is Cirque du Soleil. They are highly talented, enthusiastic, and engaged performers who come to work every single day on the edge, completely dedicated to doing better today than they did yesterday. That's the kind of culture you want. You can attract these kinds employees if you want to because all cultures are based on values.

How important is teamwork?

Teamwork is not a natural act. Most performance appraisals are about the employee as an individual. So employees want to know why they should act as a team when they are not being evaluated as a team. There are parts of the organization where you have to make changes. People can't work on a team unless they have common goals, trust each other, and are all competent. When everybody is bound by the same goal then everybody just naturally works toward making that happen. The quality guy gets together with the manufacturing guy and says, 'Let's make sure that we get this product out the door, on time, with no defects. How can we work together to make that happen?'

How important is having buy-in from company leadership in making these value changes?

Leadership has to buy-in. People from below will never do what the top does not. In so many organizations the leaders are saying, 'We want you to be this,' but they are not that. That's what I called bumper-sticker values. You have to have integrity in everything you do and every-

thing you say. A lot of CEOs only tell half the truth and hope the other half doesn't show up. You either have respect for people and you are a person of integrity, or you're not. You can't beat that into somebody. The leaders have to be committed or the employees won't be committed.

In an age of "expendable workers," you are a big proponent of smart manufacturers treating employees with dignity and respect. Why?

When we view workers as expendable, we wonder why employees check their brains at the door when they come in. I have found there is a vast difference in productivity, ideation, and creativity when people respect each other. If you respect one another you will feel better about being at work.

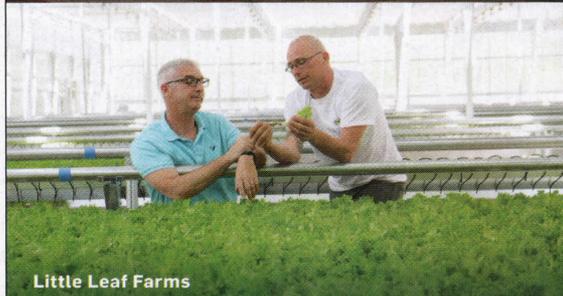
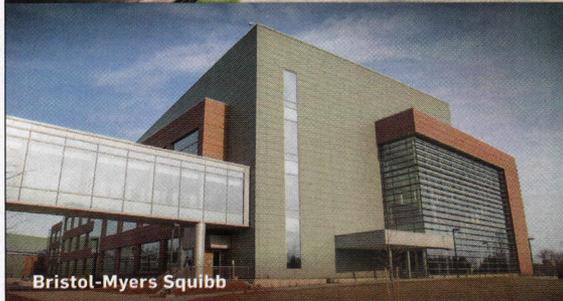
What impact do you think the Donald Trump presidency will have on manufacturing?

My suspicion is that he knows exactly what he is doing.

He has the industry right where he wants it, and we better figure out how to go along with the program. I think we have to be careful of becoming too protectionist. He knows this because he has business operations all over the world. He knows how interconnected commerce is throughout the world. I think he also knows manufacturing is imbalanced right now and not in favor of the United States. I think he wants to restore some of that balance. The manufacturing community is excited about President Trump.

THE ASSIGNMENT

Steven L. Blue is CEO of Miller Ingenuity, an innovative company revolutionizing traditional safety solutions for railway workers, and author of *American Manufacturing 2.0: What Went Wrong and How to Make It Right*. In this interview he provides insights for the business community on how to be innovative and competitive.



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