

Workforce crisis

New North Summit keynote speaker to share urgency of need for more rigorous education and job training for all Margaret LeBrun

The business community is about to hit a demographic brick wall as baby boomers retire and worldwide forces converge to create a dearth of workers — but it's not too late to take action.

That's the message Ed Gordon plans to bring to Northeast Wisconsin when he appears at the New North, Inc. Annual Summit on Dec. 14 at the Blue Harbor Resort, Sheboygan.

"In 2008, the workforce stops growing for the next 30 years," says Gordon, president of Imperial Consulting Corporation in Chicago and Palm Desert and author of several books, including "2010 Meltdown — Solving the Impending Jobs Crisis" (Praeger Publishers, 2005).

"Technology is requiring a far higher skilled workforce with an excellent liberal arts education and technical skills at a post-secondary level for 75 percent of jobs," he adds. "It's a global issue. Business won't be able to import workers from other countries with higher skills, because they are also a shortage in Europe, India, China and Japan.

"Finally, the different work-life balances of Gen X and Gen Y require major adjustments to employment by many Americans. ... You put all that together and you have a major talent crisis that business is largely ignoring."

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as New North, Inc. are tackling this issue nationwide, Gordon says. That's important, because such organizations, backed up largely by business, are best positioned to promote the urgency surrounding a shortage of skilled workers.

Gordon contends it will take a culture shift to overcome the impending worker shortage in Wisconsin and nationwide. Such a shift must be on the scale of the race to the moon following the blow to the national psyche when the Soviet Union launched Sputnik, he says.

One hundred years ago, Gordon

The system worked. But world conditions have changed. The demographic, economic and political conditions have changed. In particular, technology is driving this now. Who's to blame? Nobody. Who's to blame if we don't do



anything?
Everybody.

ED GORDON
AUTHOR, "2010
MELTDOWN"

points out, Americans took a great leap forward by embracing compulsory education, designed to give everyone a basic education. Today, however, that system prepares only about 25 percent of high school graduates for available jobs in the new millennium.

"It's not a question of who's to blame here," Gordon says. "The system worked. But world conditions have changed. The demographic, economic and political conditions have changed. In particular, technology is driving this now. Who's to blame? Nobody. Who's to blame if we don't do anything? Everybody."

There is no single pathway to overcoming the impending jobs cri-

sis, Gordon says. But clearly, business must communicate its needs better, and society must buy into the fact that more rigorous education and training is required of youth.

"Unfortunately, we are stuck with a model where politicians tell parents that every child has to go to college and get a four-year degree, mainly in business or liberal arts, or they won't be part of the American dream. That is a lie. It is propaganda. Unfortunately, the popular media has bought into this. Therefore, instead of preparing for a world of 'Star Wars' and 'Star Trek,' we are preparing our youth for something like 'Dallas,' 'L.A. Law' and Wall Street. Even though we need people in those areas, that's not where the job growth will be — and that's not where the money will be made."

Today, more than 4 million jobs are going unfilled nationwide, he says. Half of them require high skills. By 2010, that number may be as high as 6 million and at today's rate the economy will bear 12 million to 14 million unfilled jobs by 2020.

Gordon advocates a solid liberal arts education for every child, plus specialized career preparation for the career of their choice.

He prefers not to dwell on the "meltdown" title his publisher gave to his book. Rather, Gordon is optimistic that people will rise to the challenge.

"I'm talking about more and better — more high-paying jobs and a better economy for the state of Wisconsin. This next decade will be an economy of opportunity.

"It's really about culture change, business culture change, parental culture change, school culture change and political culture change. But the politicians will only do what the people ask them for. ... And that will not occur until the people of the state of Wisconsin understand the consequences of this 21st Century, high-tech age." **MP**