

# Ford's latest idea sad but necessary

Years ago, Ford Motor Co. said, "Ford has a better idea." Remember? They even had a light bulb to prove it.

As the Ford workers in Batavia know, and those in Sharonville may find out, there are bad ideas, good ideas, and unfortunate and necessary ideas. The latter hardly seem like ideas, more like alternatives.

In 1984, the United Auto Workers union had an idea, the job bank. The idea was agreed to by the once-Big Three - Chrysler, Ford and General Motors. Through the job bank, auto-workers idled by cost-reducing measures are paid not to work. The idea was, in exchange for educating themselves, doing community service or in some cases just sitting around a factory, workers would



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continue to collect pay and benefits until the automaker could find another job for them. A bad idea.

Recently, when Bill Ford, board chairman and chief executive officer of Ford, announced dramatic cost-saving measures (an unfortunate and necessary idea), he frequently used the word "innovation" when describing the company's future. Innovation is akin to idea. Ideas he cited included improvements in the safety, performance, mileage, styling and quality of Ford's products. All good ideas.

In themselves, the ideas proposed by Bill Ford are not really new, and bringing them to life will require more than wishes and words. Turning an idea it into a

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competitive advantage, among many things, requires inspiration and leadership. Unfortunately, Ford, General Motors and the UAW have large, entrenched bureaucracies that, for reasons unknown, find changes to their jobs worse than no job at all.

The leaders of Ford, GM and the UAW must open their organizations to growth ideas, and to the changes brought about by implementing

these ideas. The managers and workers of Ford and GM must be open to sensible, constructive changes in their jobs, as must the UAW.

Missing from too many organizations is either the leadership to truly commit to growth ideas and make them work; and/or the people and the organizational structure needed to bring growth ideas to life. Both shortcomings are failures of leadership. Ideas for growth, well implemented, are the lifeblood of successful organizations. After all, growth, not cost-cutting, is the way to business prosperity.

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