Outsourcing: A Growing Trend

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A hot new trend of the twenty first century is that of outsourcing certain jobs to overseas workers. During your job search you will no doubt be a victim of this business practice; indeed, many jobs previously at your disposal are no longer available. Many of these jobs are in technical and medical writing, computer programming, marketing, and layout and design work.

While a primary question remains, "Is the savings to a company in reduced startup and operating costs justified by the quality of work," it does not really matter. If that user's guide or assembly instructions contain a few typos and grammatical errors, the manufacturer does not care since millions of dollars might be saved by having English as a second language writers create the documentation. Moreover, their justification for allowing poor quality documentation is that the product will sell with or without it.

The many East Indians, Egyptians, Saudis, and Chinese currently working efficiently and productively in the U.S. are formally trained in English (as opposed to "American") at an early age. However, much of what we read and write has more than subtle nuances necessary for clear and concise writing. And this is not a reference to purist linguistic or even literary writing but rather coherent text, often written in the vernacular to enhance comprehension.

Anyone who has ever read instructions stating, "For most happiness with product assembly, please read the carefully document" knows, outsourcing writing and editing work offshore to India, Egypt, China, Korea, or the Philippines reduces labor or production costs for the U.S. company but it also reduces consumer confidence in specific brands. Documentation that is difficult to read could result in products used incorrectly, unsafely, or at the very least not to full potential.

With magazine content, bad writing and editing indicates to many poor publishing and quality control. While it may not be wise to publish written material developed by non-U.S. natives without first having such work carefully and painstakingly reviewed and edited for grammar and syntax, it should be recognized that such processes are both expensive and labor intensive for work that is done domestically.

Having a variety of skills makes employees more valuable to a company. Today's computer programmer may also have to possess management, supervisory, and marketing skills to stay competitive. It could be compared with the declining trend in Mexico and Europe for businesses to close for three or more hours for afternoon siesta. While such a practice may be great for the human physical condition, it simply is too difficult to remain competitive in the international marketplace to close shop while the rest of the world continues doing business.

The point is, as Americans in our domestic workforce we must be flexible and ready to perform more tasks than in the past. We have to show employers that we add much value to products and services. But while we cannot work for $12 a day, we can provide quality work that reflects highly on not only the individual company but also on the entire industry—whether technology, manufacturing, or product documentation—as a whole.

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