

## Guest Opinion: Talent rules new economy

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Oakland County is losing Volkswagen's North American headquarters to Virginia. VW is leaving so it can attract a skilled, young work force, says Stefan Jacoby, the newly arrived CEO of VW North America.

"By reducing this organization by 30 percent, you need even more talents, more creative people, more motivated people," he said. "Good schools, skilled workers made it an attractive site."

What does that imply about Michigan?

We are losing more than jobs - we are losing talent. Getting economically smacked up 'side the head is another painful reminder that talent rules.

If we are to thrive and not simply survive in the global knowledge economy, we must make this region and the entire state the brain bank of the world - where everyone comes for deposits and withdrawals.

Clearly the investment in Oakland University and other institutions of higher learning will continue to have economic payoff for our community and should be viewed as academic and economic engines for our state. Yet something, given the reports that 85 percent of the high-paying jobs of the future will require education beyond high school but less than a four-year college degree, demands that we tap other sources to grow our talent.

Where can individuals and companies go to sharpen their talent, help jump-start a career and get a boost up the economic ladder? Your local community college.

Oakland Community College has carried a heavy load - and will continue to do so - as Michigan transforms itself. Knowledge and talent are the 21st century ticket to individual prosperity and community development.

Knowledge and talent are themes echoed by Lou Glazer, president of Michigan's Future Inc. ([michiganfuture.org](http://michiganfuture.org)), and lead author of "A New Agenda for a New Michigan." He will tell anyone who will listen that Michigan's economic crisis is not solely driven by the decline in the domestic auto market. It is also created by a lack of robust job growth in four key sectors of the global-based, knowledge economy: information; finance/insurance; corporate headquarters; and professional/technical service. These are the growth industries of the 21st century.

He sums up Michigan's problem in one word: talent. He argues very persuasively that Michigan will only prosper if it develops, retains, fosters and attracts highly skilled young workers.

Phil Power, founder and president of The Center for Michigan ([thecenterformichigan.net](http://thecenterformichigan.net)) put it this way: "Finding, attracting, nurturing and retraining talent is the single most important thing we can do as state. It is more important than any particular whiz-bang, silver bullet economic policy."

The Michigan Legislature should heed the words of Stefan Jacoby, Lou Glazer and Phil Power. They need to measure every policy decision they make against what their actions are doing to make Michigan the talent bank of the world. Are we investing in educating our youth and retraining our existing work force?

Wake up, Michigan. Talent matters.

*Tom Watkins is a Northville education and business consultant. He served as Michigan's superintendent of public instruction from 2001-2005 and authored [The New Education \(R\)evolution](#), accessible*