Written by Jane Alexander, Editor-In-Chief
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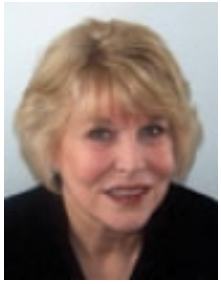

It's probably dangerous for me to wade into an interpretation of some trending, since many of you do just that for a living—*albeit from an equipment-health perspective.* But this is an opinion piece (which is one of the things I get to do for a living). So here goes.

I awoke to the announcement Friday morning, February 3 that U.S. unemployment had dropped to 8.3%. What a nice start to the day. (Of course, Chicagoland had already been celebrating the news that Chrysler's Belvidere Assembly Plant near Rockford intended to hire 1800 direct workers for two existing shifts and a soon-to-start third. That's new hires, too, just at this facility. It doesn't count non-direct jobs that will help support these operations.) Then the old "yeah, but" machine kicked in.

By the time I got to the office, the nay-saying was in full swing—*all over TV, talk radio, the Web and in those ugly emails that our most casual of acquaintances forward to everybody they know and then some.* Enough!

Yes, America's jobs deficit remains gruesome. Even former U.S. Labor Secretary Robert Reich blogged, "Given how many people have lost their jobs and how much larger the total working-age population is now, we've got a long road ahead." That's something most of us, regardless of political persuasion, can agree on. The point is, are things looking up?

As I've often said, I'm not a numbers person, nor can I intelligently discuss issues like pent-up demand (or lack thereof), etc. Doesn't matter. To my simple, sunny-side way of thinking, it would seem that those 1800 new workers at the Chrysler Belvidere site, for example, might soon be spending money on things that they couldn't when they didn't have good paychecks. So, too, I assume, might the 243,000 new and/or returning workers reflected in the latest employment statistics. Buying new clothes at the mall on the way home from work, buying a new car or truck, buying a new home and lots of new stuff to go in it…Imagine the economic steam that could build up—*and the additional jobs that could result.* Thus, at least in my opinion, the trend appears to be headed in the right direction.

Do you have a different analysis? Let me hear it. Or, help MT gather some anecdotal “data” by answering our “Question of the Month” for February: “Is your company or site hiring, and for what positions?” (Please go to www.mt-online.com/question and tell us what you know.)

Speaking of trending, I again encourage you to join us next month at MARTS 2012. Our keynoter on Tuesday, March 13, is David Boulay, Ph.D., President of the Illinois Manufacturing Extension Center. His topic? “Managing the Trends.” In light of the recent good (O.K., “gooder”) news from the jobs front, it promises to be quite an interesting session. Register now at www.MARTSconference.com. I’m looking forward to meeting and talking with you in Rosemont!

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PS: Don't forget: We're always looking for MT Reader Panelists to join our team. While I've just asked this month for your opinion on industry job trends, Executive Editor Rick Carter features Reader Panelists' insight based on their own operations and experiences in his "For On The Floor" column that runs six times per year. Check out this opportunity at: www.mt-online.com/readerpanel.