

# STILL TRYING TO COMPETE ON PRICE?

## TAKE A NEW TAAC

By: William J Bujalos, Director – MidAtlantic Trade Adjustment Assistance Center

Let me guess. If you're in a manufacturing business you're probably getting hammered by imports. Your survival is at stake and like many companies; you're faced with three basic options:

1. you can fold your tent and go home
2. you can fight our free trade policies, or
3. you can get serious about upgrading your company's global competitiveness – get very serious

If you're really not suited for battle in this new world, option #1 is probably your best bet. Leave the field and don't look back. But if you're "mad as hell and not going to take it any more" (don't you just love that quote?) then consider options #2 and #3.



Now which outcome do you think you have more control over? If it's option #2, you might want to reconsider. It's your right of course as a taxpayer to fight government policies that you oppose. But it's naive to think that, in isolation, this will assure your firm's survival. Eventually you'll have to confront the fact that you and your team are the ones on the front lines and that your shop is the theater of battle over which you exercise most control. Waiting for assorted politicians, diplomats, and bureaucrats to bring relief any time soon is just plain silly.

Permanently improving your company's global competitiveness can be a daunting and expensive task .... at first. But what if you had a partner that could match your investment dollar-for-dollar and wouldn't demand an equity stake or repayment? What if that partner didn't have an agenda to sell you anything. Consider **Trade Adjustment Assistance for Firms**. Their web site is [www.taacenters.org](http://www.taacenters.org). It's a Federal program through the Department of Commerce for manufacturers negatively impacted by imports. The deal is this: If you come to the table with a commitment to permanently upgrade the way in which your organization competes, then the folks who run this program can show up with the ability to cut your investment for it in half – now go ahead, beat *that* with a stick!

The money can't be used for buildings, equipment or salaries but the company receives half of the cost to upgrade its business processes that may include Marketing, Sales, Manufacturing, Product Development, Financial Management, Cost Systems, MIS, Lean Implementations, ISO Certifications, Quality Assurance, Management Development, or just about any business process that would come under the overarching label of General Continuous Improvement. It's used to hire outside experts and consultants who can focus 100% on your competitiveness issues ... allowing you to concentrate on the little things, like making payroll by Thursday afternoon.

The program is managed through a nationwide network of Trade Adjustment Assistance Centers (TAAC's). There is no cost to enter the program. The TAAC handles all the work and submittals to Washington. Once your company is certified as being trade impacted (a process that requires verification of certain metrics like sales and headcount declines and increases in the importation of competitive goods) they work with you to develop a formal plan of attack for Washington's approval. It outlines what projects will be implemented over what timeframe, and what kind of outside expertise has to be engaged. The size of the grant necessary to help fund this activity is determined as well.

So if you're serious about your firm's competitiveness call the office in your region, and get started – now.