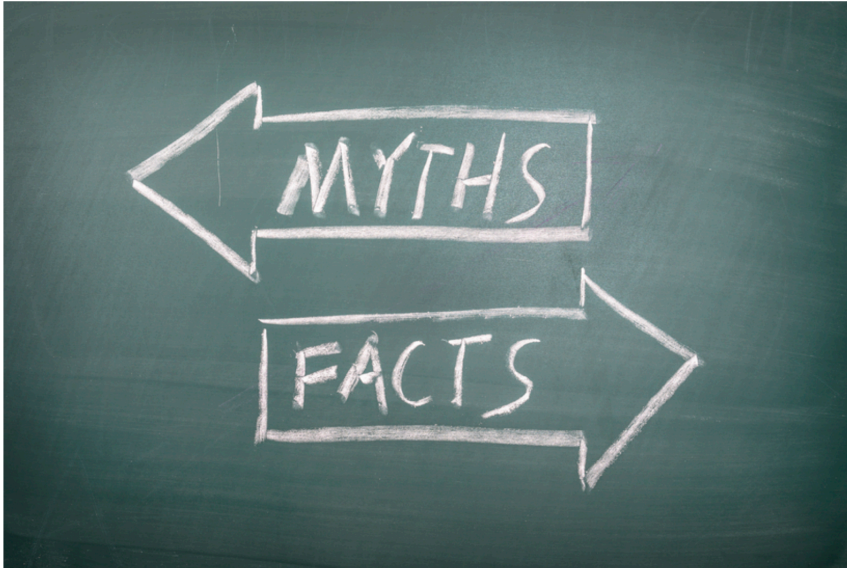**Nicholas Wyman, Contributor**
I blog about job skills and training in the 21st-century workplace

Is Vocational Education an Unviable Alternative to University or College?

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Do you consider vocational education a unviable alternative to university or college? You are not alone. However, you need to think again. I would like to invite you to put aside your pre-conceived beliefs about vocational education and training (VET) and let me explain how misconceptions about VET are hurting the next generation's chances of a meaningful future at work.

We have all heard the old adage 'perception is reality', but when it comes to VET, nothing is further from the truth. Here's my premise: Skills-based education gives young people the chance to get experience and gain confidence early. It can catapult them into steady jobs, a great pay packet and, more than likely, a future-proof career.

Have you ever thought or believed any of these common statements? Well, allow me to bust these myths.

Myth 1. Apprenticeships are old fashioned - they aren't funky

Actually, they are. And they're really coming into their own in major economies.

For example, in the US, after waning and being restricted to a narrow range of fields over the past few decades, apprenticeship programs are coming back in a big way. There are more than 505,000 people in the US currently enrolled as apprentices – the highest rate in eight years, and US apprenticeship programs are increasingly offering the entry key to careers in a vast array of growing fields such as IT, health care, hospitality and advanced manufacturing, to name a few.

> *Despite that, 8 of 10 people surveyed by the US National Association of Manufacturers said they would not encourage their own children to enter the manufacturing field.*

Those same people said they view manufacturing as critical to the prosperity and security of the US (90% of those surveyed actually ranked manufacturing top of the list of important industries!).