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Robots and jobs

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?Train to become a television repairman!?

Anyone of a certain age remembers seeing that ad on the back of a comic book with a few other standards like Sea Monkeys and x-ray glasses.

I did buy the Sea Monkeys for, I think, a dollar, and had three full days of fun watching my colony go from a thousand swimmers down to two lonely survivors. I had my doubts about the x-ray glasses though.

The television repairman ad featured an illustration of a television along with happy looking guy in uniform complete with a official looking jaunty cap.

Learning the trade of checking vacuum tubes and repairing television sets was at one time an actual job.

If your TV had problems a guy would come to your house and fix it so the whole family could tune in and watch the Ed Sullivan show or I Love Lucy.

The reason you don't see those ads any more is because, thanks to solid state digital technology, you no longer repair a television set. You take it to the dump or the local electronic recycling station.

The same goes for pretty much every other electronic device. If it doesn't work, you buy a new one.

The servicing job simply became redundant.

There are a lot of jobs that have either dwindled down to a few people still doing it or have simply disappeared altogether. A lot more seem to be on the verge of going the way of the dinosaur, and there is an even bigger list of jobs expected to be reduced in huge numbers or simply fade away in the next 20 years.

In the manufacturing industry especially, there has been a lot of concern over technology replacing employees. Many automotive plants already have robots that do what people used to do.

The difference is that a robot doesn't make mistakes, doesn't get tired, always shows up for work, never complains, is available all the time, and best of all, doesn't expect a pay cheque at the end of the week.

From a business perspective investing in a robot makes sense. It will do a job and will save you big bucks over time and increase your bottom line ? and that's what business is all about, and that's why investors buy shares in public companies.

Of course many unions are fretting over job loss. That's what they do for a living ? protect their workers.

So far the industry has not seen big job losses due to increased technology ? a least not in large numbers like seeing an entire plant re-tooled, outfitted with robots, and a thousand people out of work.

Currently the Honda plant in Alliston, for example, employs around 4,600 people and lots more through other companies that supply parts and transportation. No doubt that number will get smaller over time.

The question some are asking is, what are all these people going to do about employment?

Well, there is a lot of good news with all this technology replacing workers.

For the most part, it seems people leaving certain job sectors will go via attrition. Whether retirement or job changes, companies will simply not replace a worker.

As employment opportunities decrease in some areas, other opportunities will open up.

The challenge is for the next generation of people entering the work force to make some good decisions when it comes to preparing for a future.

Training will become everything. Most companies now require at least a high school diploma ? although that is merely a formality. A high school diploma doesn't qualify you to work in a fast food restaurant any more than having a grade 8 education does.

In the future, completing high school will become almost meaningless in the world of employment. The way the job market is trending, pretty much everyone will need some kind of skill to compete and find a job.

That is the good side of all this new technology. People must be better educated, and that includes everything from completing a degree in technology to being trained in an apprenticeship in the trades ? which by the way is a field that is predicted to need a lot of new people in the next ten years.

While the TV repairman, and most likely the Maytag guy we used to see on TV, have disappeared, new technology is opening up a lot of new opportunities.

You just have to look for them.