

Who Has the Best Job in the World?

New appreciation for the coolest part of a finisher's job

Chainsaws, jet engine compressor blades, caskets, engine blocks, construction lumber and fishing flies. What do these items have in common?

The answer is that they were all featured on recently aired episodes of "How it's Made." Appearing regularly on the Science Channel and the Discovery Channel, this fascinating show demonstrates the processes by which everyday items are manufactured.

While surfing up and down the endless waves of digital cable channels, I frequently trip over a similar show, "Made in America." This one appears on the Travel Channel, and features John Ratzenberger ("Cliff" of *Cheers* fame) voyaging about the United States in a Discovery Class A Diesel Motor home festooned with the Travel Channel logo and the "Made in America" moniker.

As his trip progresses, Ratzenberger visits and tours the most enduring of domestic manufacturers. Airstream Trailers, the Monopoly board game, 3M Scotch Tape and (a personal favorite) the Maker's Mark Distillery are just a handful of the manufacturers whose products and processes have been featured on the program.

into our everyday lives came to be. From the machines that make them to the people that envision and design them to those that run the machines, we love to hear—and SEE—their story.

Which leads me to the point. As coaters, platers and finishers, we have the best jobs in the world.

"Yeah, right," you respond. "We deal with a never-ending sea of environmental regulations, the headaches of process control, customers with ever-higher demands, requests for cost reductions, commodity price increases, etc., etc." To be sure, we have our challenges and deal with our share of unappealing topics, but not so long ago I experienced a revelation of sorts.

I have the best job in the world. And while it has its variety—board meetings, team development, efficiency improvements, visiting satellite facilities, considering acquisitions, reviewing financial statements and so on—there are two aspects I love more than any others. The first aspect, watching and helping team members learn and grow, is a topic for another column.

The second aspect of my job that makes it the best job in the world is visiting with customers and prospects, understanding their problems, touring their operations, and seeing—up close and personal—how their products are made.

All over America people are clicking on shows like "How it's Made" and "Made in America" to watch, via their flat screens, how all this "stuff" comes to be. They do this in their spare time!

The success of these television shows is an example, for sure, of one thing. Americans have an infatuation with how the products that find their way

In just the last quarter I have seen the following: Bicycles (I have a soft spot in my heart for anything related to road or mountain biking) being manufactured, assembled and painted.

Huge file cabinets fabricated and finished. An 800-hp recreational marine engine being tested in a lab.

ATV mufflers deep drawn, welded and coated. High-end office furniture and cubicles being created from raw materials.

Automobile and truck wheels being manufactured and painted by the tens of thousands.

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Huge earth movers, beginning with nothing more than a chassis and ending with a piece of industrial art.

Intricate and precise components being produced and assembled into vehicle seats that look just like the ones in my car.

Wiring harnesses, enclosures, circuit boards and connectors integrated into multi-million dollar cutting-edge telecommunications equipment.

Ceramic materials, forms and huge ovens flushing out (pardon the pun) thousands of toilet bowls.

Consumer products like barbecue grills, safes and appliances manufactured one after another.

After one plant tour, I walked out of the customer's lobby, crawled behind the wheel of my car and accelerated out of the parking lot. As my mind began to wander it occurred to me. All over America people are clicking on shows like "How it's Made" and "Made in America" to watch, via their flat screens, how all this "stuff" comes to be.

I had to chuckle. They do this in their spare time! It's an entertaining leisure activity for them.

As coaters and finishers we're fascinated by the same things. The difference? We get to see it in person AND we get paid to do it.

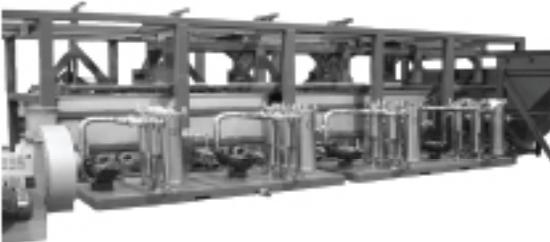
I have the best job in the world! ■



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