The illiteracy crisis has been well publicized. A sizeable, and increasing, number of North American workers simply can't read, write or do simple math. The implications for the competitiveness of industry are frightening. It's a real problem and one that we just cannot ignore.

While there certainly are no quick fixes, by taking what I call a strategic approach to training, companies can start to solve the illiteracy problem.

The strategic approach means first of all, coupling training with a company's business goals. Obviously, no company can achieve its business goals without people who possess the necessary skills to execute the strategic initiatives which underpin those goals. Thorough understanding of those initiatives and associated skills require the involvement of everyone in the organization.

It also means continuous training. In other words, training is a continuous part of planning, personal development and of working.
This need to train and retrain will intensify in the years ahead. And it will require use of all the resources industry and academia, working together, can muster.

Consider these statistics:

People hired this year can be expected to change jobs five to six times during their work lives;

By the year 2000 -- less than 12 years from now -- an estimated 5-to-15 million manufacturing jobs will require different skills;

All of this data makes it very clear that if industry is to be globally competitive, it must change the social contract employers have with this changing workforce. Absolutely crucial in that regard is the development and empowerment of employees and that means making training and retraining a basic operating principle.

None of this is really possible without the widespread of computer technology in the training and development process. An example of this approach is Control Data's computer-assisted Adult Literacy Training System -- a program already at work in factories, schools and community colleges. In all these and other settings as well, the program has proven to be easy to use, cost-effective and, most importantly, self-motivating.

[PAUSE]
America's illiteracy problem can best be solved by a strategic approach to education and training. The key to this strategic approach, however, is academia working closely with American industry.

Together, we can help reduce illiteracy in the workplace. We can develop smarter workers for smarter machines. And, in the end, achieve the quality and productivity essential for America to be globally competitive.