

## Mexico Job Shop Celebrates Golden Anniversary

Recubrimientos Metálicos de México (RM), one of the leading electroplating job shops in Mexico, is celebrating its 50th anniversary in June 2004. The shop was started in 1954 as a zinc plating operation. It was the first company in Latin America to automate its zinc plating system.

During its years of operation, more than 17 different processes have been installed to meet the growing needs of the market.

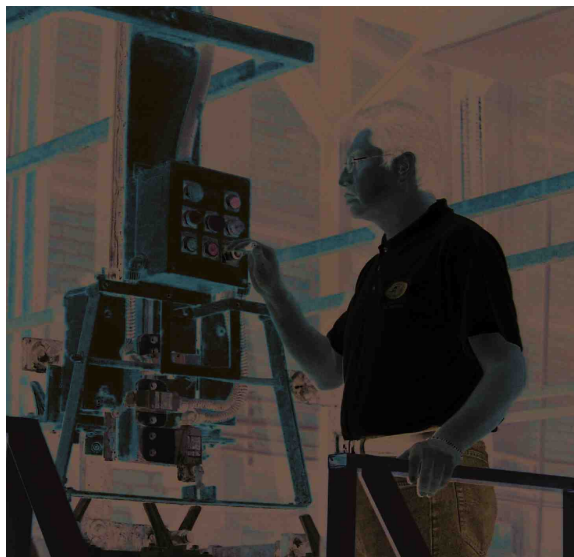
### Quality & Service Have Guided Company

During 50 years of providing finishing services, RM management and staff have supported a culture of quality and customer service. The company is certified for ISO 9001:2000 quality management system, and has received industry wide recognition for its commitment to providing the best possible surface finishing services.

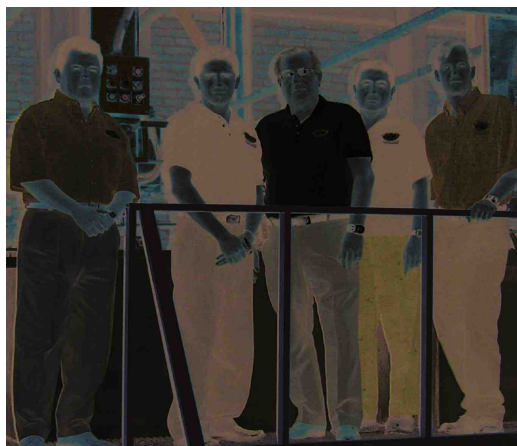
### Finishing Processes

Services offered by RM include zinc plating (blue, white, yellow, olive green, black and green dye), chromates, bright nickel, electroless nickel (high- and mid-phosphorus), antique nickel, satin nickel, bright and antique brass, cadmium, tin, phosphate (zinc and manganese, black oxide, bright and satin chromium, color chrome, bright and antique copper, stainless steel passivate, hydrogen embrittlement relief, buffing/polishing, tumbling, vibratory finishing, stripping and more.

The job shop provides decorative and functional finishes for a wide range of industries, including automotive, construction, hardware, electronics and electric, fastener, furniture and others.



*Most of the plating operations at Recubrimientos Metálicos de México are fully automated. Manuel Arenas, plating supervisor, is shown here with one of four hoists used for automatic zinc plating.*



*The management team at Recubrimientos Metálicos de México includes, from left: J. Carlos Vergara, office administrator; Lucio Guarneros, quality engineer; Pedro Noroña, sales manager; Gabriel Froylan, plant manager; and Carlos Cielak, general manager.*



*Recubrimientos Metálicos de México provides a wide variety of finishing services. This photo shows some of the components finished at the facility.*



*Gabriel Froylan, plant manager, is shown here checking plating parameters.*

# Managing with Hispanic Workers

By Woodruff Imberman & Mariah DeForest

It takes neither a scholarly professor nor a seasoned clairvoyant to realize that the surging wave of Hispanic immigrants is having a profound effect on American society in general, and on the plating/coating industry in particular.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, some 45,000 new jobs will be added in the plating/coating industry this decade, almost double the growth achieved in the last decade. Virtually all will be filled by immigrants, mainly Hispanic. This will boost the national average of Hispanic employment in this industry to 27.3 percent in 2010, up from 16 percent in 2000. To improve productivity, cut labor costs, boost their own profitability—and perhaps even survive in today's cut throat markets—platers and coaters of all types must learn to motivate the zooming numbers of Latin workers.

A study just released by the Bureau of the Census shows the most rapid growing segment of the U.S. population is Hispanic. In 2002, there were 37.4 million Hispanics in the civilian population, representing 13.3 percent of all people living in the U.S. This percentage will increase substantially in coming years.

Dealing successfully with Hispanic newcomers means more than just using a bi-lingual foreman as an interpreter. Motivating Hispanics means understand-

ing their cultural traditions, and honoring them in work-place practices. Doing this generates peak productivity, which is essential in competitive plating markets dominated by cost-cutting customers eager to shave expenses.

## Chicago Example

A new manager was hired for a troubled Chicago zinc electroplater producing specialty fasteners for the automotive and off-highway construction equipment industries. It had a large contingent of Mexican workers and a poor record on productivity and quality. Full of vim, vigor, and a burning desire to prove himself, this new manager decided to improve the situation by getting "closer" to the mostly Spanish-speaking work force.

Trading his coat and tie for jeans and sport shirt, he asked his Hispanic foremen and employees to call him by his first name. He started tours of the plant

floor with a translator, looking for ways to "help" workers while correcting their errors. He felt he was "establishing good relations," by simultaneously pushing hard for better quality and productivity while reducing the visible economic and status gap between him and his workers.

Despite his "corrective" tactics and casual approach in dress and conduct, plant performance continued down hill. Why? Because he did not understand the mind set of his Hispanic workers. Like many Americans, he was unaware that managing employees with Hispanic backgrounds, cultures, and psychologies is different from managing an Anglo workforce.

## Management Oversight

Hispanic employees considered this new plant manager uncultured and boorish. He did not know that Hispanics expect the "boss" stereotype to be reflected in appearance, *i.e.*, the higher the status or importance of the job, the more formal the attire.

The poor performance was not because the casually dressed manager insisted on improving quality and productivity. It was because he shouted and showed disrespect for his heavily Mexican workforce when the inevitable production problems occurred. The Mexicans (few legal, and most new to America) wanted him to be proper, aloof, reserved, and very formal. Shouts and foul epithets in Mexico are for barnyard animals. Any manager or foreman who raises his voice or curses Hispanic workers will earn disdain, not cooperation. Quality of the plant's shipments continued to be poor, and customer complaints about late deliveries burgeoned.

## Location & Employment

In 2002, there were 37.4 million Hispanics in the United States—13.3 percent of the total population (Chart 2). The great

TABLE I  
OCCUPATION

OCCUPATION	HISPANIC	NON-HISPANIC WHITE
Services	22.1%	11.6%
Operators/Laborers	20.8%	10.9%
Managerial/Professional	14.2%	35.1%

Source: Annual Demographic Supplement; March, 2002 Current Population Survey, U.S. Census Bureau

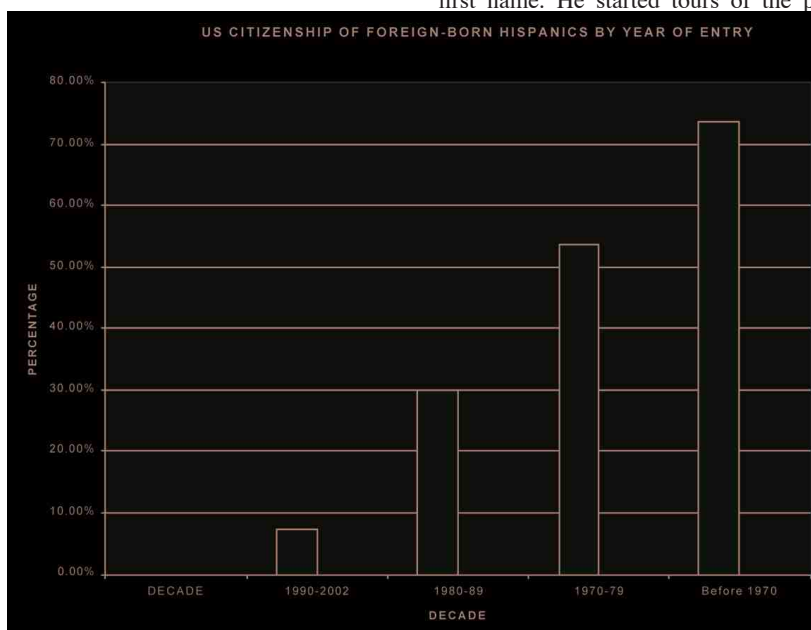


Chart 1

majority are in our nation's metropolitan areas, especially inner cities. The relatively few Hispanics in rural areas are heavily employed in the food industry, such as poultry processors in the South, and beef and pork slaughtering plants in the Midwest and West.

Some 22.1 percent of Hispanics work in service occupations, and 20.8 percent are employed in industry (Table I). The percentage of Hispanics in the overall workforce is growing faster than any other group (Table II). About 24 percent of employees in American manufacturing are Hispanic, up from 12 percent in 1984. In some plants the percentage is more than 90 percent, particularly in Chicago, New York City area, parts of the South West, and the industrial areas of Northern Illinois and the Rust Belt. About 85 percent of the workers at Chicago plating shops were Hispanic.

## Citizenship

A large and growing number of Hispanics living here are undocumented (Chart 1). According to University of Pennsylvania sociologist Douglas Massey, 3.5 million indocumentados entered the U.S. last year, compared to about 2.5 million a year for most of the 90s. This influx, according to a study by UCLA sociologist Liza Catanzarite, has decreased wage levels in a wide range of blue-collar occupations in America's big cities.

"It all comes down to the marginal status of immigrant Latinos," she said. "Immigrant workers are willing to work for less money and are less likely to defend their rights in the workplace, which drag down wages of all workers in the industry." As a result, the percentage of Hispanics living below the poverty line is much greater than non-Hispanic whites.

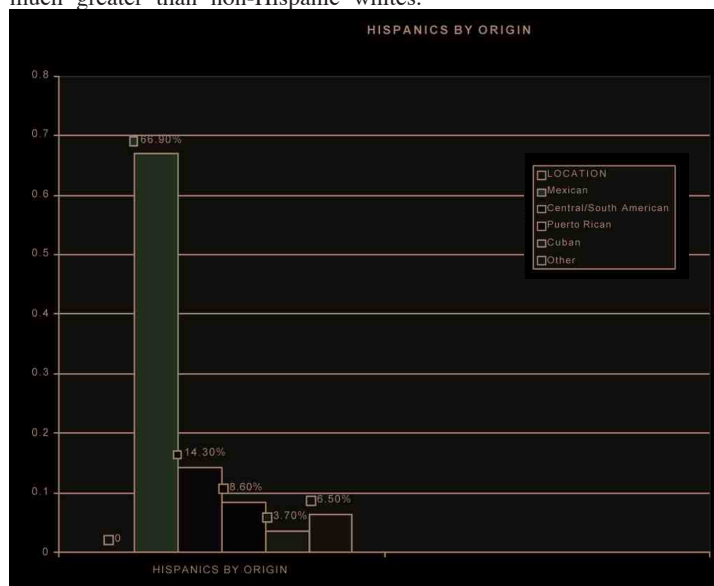


Chart 2

**TABLE II**  
**DISTRIBUTION OF CIVILIAN LABOR FORCE,**  
**1990, 2000, and PROJECTED 2010**

Numbers in thousands

GROUP	1990	2000	2010
WHITE	107,447 (78.7%)	117,574 (75.3%)	128,043 (71.7%)
BLACK	13,740 (10.0%)	16,603 (10.6%)	20,041 (11.2%)
HISPANIC	10,720 (7.8%)	15,368 (9.8%)	20,947 (11.7%)
ASIAN	4,653 (3.4%)	6,687 (4.2%)	9,636 (5.4%)

Source: Fullerton, H.N., and Toossi, Mitra, *Labor Force Projections to 2010*, Monthly Labor Review, November, 2001, Table 8, Pg. 32.

During the 2001 recession and so-called jobless recovery of 2002, nearly the entire net drop in U.S. employment was borne by native Americans, whose work was absorbed by low cost immigrants, according to a February 2003 study of the Center for Labor Market Studies at Northeastern University, Boston, MA.

## Signs of Poor Management

Whatever their origin, pay level, or citizenship, Hispanics can be well managed and treated in a way that motivates them to do their best. Hispanic inability to communicate well in English does not mean they cannot contribute strongly to higher productivity and quality, nor does it mean they are stupid or have no ideas about how to improve plating operations. Properly managed Hispanics perform as well as, if not better, than their Anglo counterparts.

The typical American misunderstanding exhibited by the Chicago plant manager for the customs and psychology of foreign-born workers resulted in alienation, sinking internal performance and a meager bottom line. The plant manager tried to "solve" his problems by hiring more Anglos for his lower level jobs. Few Anglos were willing to take on the arduous work, pay scales, or

working conditions that Hispanics gladly accepted.

## Cultural Differences Based on Background

To gain the best efforts of Hispanic workers, plant managers must abandon the notion that Hispanics are like other workers, except they speak Spanish. Hispanics, in general, have a psychology and culture different from those in America.

Hispanics, especially Mexican, are raised with emphasis on knowing one's place, hard work, and self-abnegation. Because God put man on this planet, any station in life, be it janitor or president, is worthy of the same respect. Coming close to the religious concept of predestination, this Hispanic attitude is reflected by polite speech, a courtesy, and an acknowledgment that every worker has an important role. People are identified by class and roles, and Hispanics expect them to act in accordance with those roles. A plant manager wearing casual clothes is regarded as "lacking in respect."

Women, too, have a special place in Hispanic culture. In Mexico, Mothers Day is a national holiday. Here, Hispanic women still expect the same respect that they received South of the Border. A wise plant manager will arrange a minor celebration of Mother's Day, complete with small corsages, kind words, and perhaps a special lunch.

## Time & Nature

Hispanic workers' conception of time and punctuality is based on nature, and is far different from the Anglo view. Many of the Mexican workers in this Chicago plant were former campesinos, rurals accustomed to rising and going to bed with the sun. (This is true of most Mexicans and also of many other Hispanics new to the U.S.) Clocks and punctuality need to be taught, as well as the seriousness of absenteeism. It took great patience by foremen in the Chicago plant to instill the importance of punctuality and daily attendance in their Hispanic workers. It required special train-



ing to show Anglo foremen how to use proper terms and gestures of respect, while indoctrinating the Hispanics—tasks not easy to instill in American foremen.

## Know How, Courtesy & Recognition

While Hispanics admire Americans for their know-how, their technology, and their energetic approach to jobs, they also feel that American plants are all business and lack the normal human sentiments they value. Hispanics like a smile, or a “Buenos Dias” in the morning. They expect courtesy during training, and correction of their mistakes instead of criticism. The impact of training on Hispanic employees can be greatly increased by emphasizing its ceremonial aspects.

Recognition is especially important. Managers need to make special efforts to invite Hispanic employees to job training classes and require attendance for them to “graduate.” Special “diplomas” upon course completion, with displays of “graduation” photos in the plant lunchroom provide Hispanic employees with the respect they believe is deserved. Employee recognition and its simple manifestations are the heart of Hispanic employee relations; and proved to be very fruitful at the Chicago plant.

Mexicans want their foremen to be like teachers and fathers, paternalistic and kindly, anxious to correct and guide, and with an understanding of human frailty. Hispanics respond magnificently when the actions of American managers and foremen demonstrate real interest and respect for them. Hispanics place great emphasis on the need to recognize the “place” of

the employee, to use certain phrases and formulas of “respect” when correcting an employee’s work, and to avoid any show of undue familiarity with Hispanic female employees.

In the Chicago plant, a list of common “workplace” English phrases was given to the Hispanic workers, who appreciated and learned their use. (The ability to communicate with “elite” Americans was an important status symbol). At the same time, Anglo foremen were provided common Spanish phrases, which they learned and used, drawing appreciative smiles (and better performance) from workers.

Friendliness, smiles, and a kindly manner go a long way toward winning the loyalty and cooperation of Hispanic workers. Lack of Spanish fluency leads many American managers to rush through the plant, avoiding contact with Hispanic employees. Facial expressions can convey what language cannot.

## Getting Quality & Cooperation

Most Mexicans believe American standards require perfection. It is useful to show Hispanic workers that good quality has range and can still meet quality standards. To do this, plant management should post pictures illustrating acceptable product quality.

Most Mexican employees in American plants are hard, uncomplaining workers, and are usually not given to filing grievances or protesting working conditions. They are bewildered by the idea that a worker has a right to complain about a superior’s behavior. Telling Hispanics they can appeal a foreman’s ruling to “up-stairs” goes against the grain. This is a disrespectful challenge to supervisory authority, something almost no Hispanic would do. They don’t join unions or strike unless ignored, treated as adjuncts to the plating tanks, or gravely provoked by having their dignity violated.

## Identifying Irritants

Periodic employee audits by outside experts quickly identify worker concerns and highlight their ideas to improve productivity and quality. This requires face-to-face interviews with Hispanic workers, which often turn up many irritants that neither plant managers nor Spanish-

speaking foremen are aware. Some examples: a hole in the floor can cause boxes to fall from forklifts; poor work scheduling can lead to part pile-ups in one area or another; overlooked maintenance and cleaning of electrostatic sprayers can defeat production goals. Most important, abusive foremen can be identified and their behavior corrected.

Audits also defuse unionization attempts of Hispanic workers, or avert strikes in unionized plants. Audits by outside consultants invariably highlight many helpful suggestions for improvement of morale and operations. Hispanics rarely reveal such ideas to company executives or interviewers for fear of reprisals.

After such a two-way communications system is started by an outside expert, Hispanic employees learn that their ideas are welcomed. Then, the company human resource department can be trained to take over the audit function.

For plant managers who make these efforts to understand Hispanic culture and outlook, who try to improve communications and institute special training procedures, the payoff can be very great: higher morale and productivity, less waste and spoilage, lower labor costs, and greater profitability.

## About the Author



*Dr. Woodruff Imberman is president and CEO of Imberman and DeForest, Inc., 1740 Ridge Ave., Evanston, IL 60201. The management consulting firm specializes in human resource administration, including group employee incentive compensation plans to motivate workers for*

*performance improvement, employee communications programs, management development and supervisory training efforts, diversity advocacy programs with special emphasis on Latino cultures, and positive employee relations programs in both union and non-union settings. He has lectured at more than a dozen universities, including Indiana University, Tulane University, Lake Forest College Graduate School of Management, and Depaul University. He has published more than 400 articles on various aspects of human resource administration and compensation. The firm has been involved in many segments of industry in the U.S., Canada and Mexico. He can be contacted by e-mail at IMBAndDEF@aol.com.*

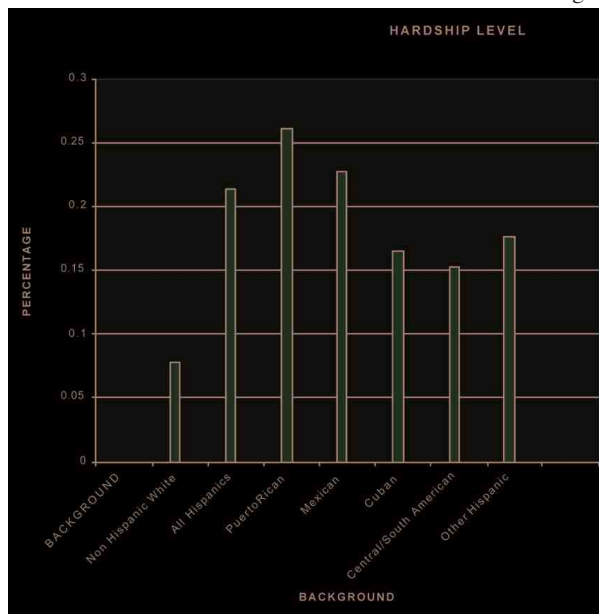


Chart 3