

# Emsi Burning Glass's CEO counsels workers to train for a future rich in logistics, cybersecurity, green jobs, and artificial intelligence.

[I inquirer.com/business/technology/emsi-burning-glass-worker-retention-talent-acquisition-jobs-workplace-20211009.html](https://www.inquirer.com/business/technology/emsi-burning-glass-worker-retention-talent-acquisition-jobs-workplace-20211009.html)

Technology

Everyone needs a direction app for their career, said Emsi Burning Glass CEO Matt Sigelman. Better training can also supercharge careers and improves the economy.



Emsi Burning Glass CEO Matt Sigelman is photographed at the Main Line Classical Academy in Bryn Mawr, Pa. on Sep. 3, 2021. As CEO, Sigelman believes better training is needed for jobs across the economy. He and his wife Asya have put their ideas into action in this school, which merges classical training with scientific rigor.

JOSE F. MORENO / Staff Photographer

*by Christine M. Johnson-Hall, For The Inquirer*

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Matt Sigelman's side project, as a co-founder of a Bryn Mawr school steeped in the wisdom of the Ancient World, might seem to be a big departure from his day job as a data maven on the future of work. But it really isn't. The venerated skills of problem solving and critical thinking are needed more than ever as workers confront a fast-changing work world.

Sigelman, 47, is CEO of Boston-based Emsi Burning Glass, a private company owned by investment firm Kohlberg Kravis Roberts that researches and analyzes the transforming American workplace.

Sifting through data, Emsi Burning Glass produces reports for such companies as Amazon that tackle questions on some of the most critical challenges facing the global workforce, such as how employers can best attract and retain workers, how workers can “future-proof” their skills, which industries will thrive over the next decade and which will sunset.

To be sure, the U.S. and global workplace is undergoing unprecedented distortion and change, brought on by the pandemic, that has produced, for example, the oddity of widespread unemployment and plentiful job openings, at the same time.

Yet, many experts say the health crisis has only deepened, not created, the chasm between jobs of the future and the skills shortfall of many workers, who are in danger of being further mired in historic social inequalities.

Sigelman, who testified before a House subcommittee on Higher Education and Workforce Training in May, made many suggestions to help bridge that divide.

Workers and employers need to look further ahead than the current, chaotic moment, Sigelman said. Five years from now, the jobs in demand will look much different, with a surge in logistics, cybersecurity, green jobs, artificial intelligence, and other roles — projected at 15.5 million to 18 million new jobs nationwide, according to Emsi Burning Glass research. That would be one in six U.S. jobs by 2026 — all projected to pay above the national average.

Sigelman’s clients “leverage our data to see what the landscape of [workplace] opportunity is,” he said. Emsi Burning Glass “captures career histories of about 40% of the U.S. workforce and sees whether people are actually moving up. Who’s moving up and who’s stuck.”

The bespectacled, dark-haired Ivy Leaguer earned degrees from Harvard Business School and the Princeton School of Public and International Affairs. He credits his “weird and wonderful” independent K-12 school, Saint Ann’s School in New York, for sparking a love of learning.

“It had a student smoking lounge and a policy of optional class attendance,” Sigelman recalled with a smile. More than anything, though, the school gave students “the skills to reinvent ourselves.”

As a young McKinsey consultant, Sigelman was the go-to guy in the office for the big data tool of the day, Microsoft Access. It was the ’90s, “when data was a provenance of geeks instead of the stuff that makes business run,” he recalled. “Clients had lots of data and didn’t really know how to unlock its potential. And I became fascinated with that problem.”

There he helped discover new, unconventional data that enabled Capital One to establish a foothold in credit card markets in India. Missing the traditional metrics needed to establish credit-worthiness, such as Social Security numbers, Sigelman helped devise an alternate model that leaned on other telling, and readily available, information such as consumption patterns and career trajectory.

Helping address this challenge eventually led him to Burning Glass, founded by data scientists from Carnegie Mellon University in 1999. Then a small start-up based in San Diego, the company used AI pattern analysis to understand how people move from job to job.

Purchasing Burning Glass in 2002, Sigelman obtained the framework to build and deliver a real-time, drone's-eye view of the jobs market — collecting up-to-the-minute, complex labor market data from government reports, job postings, and social media profile data to provide software, research, and reports to clients. Studying how people move through their careers, data scientists and analysts created tools to help employers understand employment, economic trends, and training needs for their regions.

In June, Burning Glass acquired analytics firm Emsi for an undisclosed amount to bolster skills tracking, analytics software “that define talent pools and unlock opportunity,” Sigelman said. His hope for the acquisition is to foster a potent “mechanism for policymakers, workers, companies to connect more efficiently.”

Sigelman believes jobs need to be broken down to the basic skills required; whether data analytics, problem solving, or public speaking. With common definitions in hand, Sigelman hopes to see community colleges, in turn, also translate their curriculum into simple language, explaining what skills each course offers.

“If the job market is the Tower of Babel, we can create that common language ... and that language is skills,” he said.

“We can see how skills, educational requirements, and other employer demands evolve in near-real-time,” he said. The merged company employs more than 600 people in the U.S., Europe, Asia and New Zealand.

Emsi Burning Glass used its data to help juggernaut client Amazon, which employs about 25,000 full and part-time workers in Pennsylvania, build and launch the [Amazon Career Choice program](#).

Amazon's initiative pays up to 95% of tuition and fees toward a certificate or diploma in qualified fields, leading to in-demand jobs in information technology, health care, mechanical and skilled trades and transportation. Target, Walmart, Chipotle, and other major U.S employers are [following the trend](#). Amazon is not the largest of Emsi Burning Glass's 4,000 clients, which Sigelman declined to identify.

Among top concerns for employers and employees alike, Sigelman said, is if workers aren't better trained, everyone suffers. What results is "a potent drag on our national economy and America's ability to be globally competitive," he added.

Colleges need to update curricula, community colleges should refocus on workforce programs and unemployment offices should be linked to job training, Sigelman said, listing some of his top proposed solutions to the skills gap.

Overall, the top three skills employers seek are leadership, innovation, and problem-solving, he said.

And for employers, diversity and inclusion programs continue to be a potent way for companies to develop talent pools, he added.

"In the wake of George Floyd's death, companies realize they can build diversity from within. Most companies are dramatically more diverse at entry levels than executive levels," Sigelman said. "What's missing is the connection between the two," adding that skill-building can provide "pathways that become escalators for talent."

With his expansive set of interests and voracious curiosity, Sigelman followed a calling that led him far from the data path. Seven years ago, he and his wife, Asya Sigelman, an associate professor of Greek, Latin, and Classical Studies at Bryn Mawr College, opened [the Main Line Classical Academy](#), realizing a mutual dream they discovered on only their second date in 2007. They married in 2008.

Now parents of five, they started the K-8 school with four students and currently have 80 children studying not only the classical canon of Latin, Greek, art, the humanities, and music, but also computer programming, biology, physics and research electives to build what he calls "timeless and timely" learning.

"We ask our students to memorize poetry.," Sigelman said. "The key idea of this school is that if you want to train students to be leaders, in any field or career, they need to be not reacting to what we believe to be the future; they need to be shaping it," Sigelman said.

Timely advice for students and job seekers alike.

*Christine M. Johnson-Hall is a former Inquirer correspondent who worked for the Today's Spirit newspaper, United Press International, the Morning Call newspaper, and the Vanguard Group before retiring after 22 years in 2020 to launch CJH Communications.*

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