BIFMA 2026

360 LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE

THE FUTURE OF MANUFACTURING IN AN ERA OF ACCELERATION

A PERSONAL NOTE FROM FUTURIST JIM CARROLL

It was fantastic to spend time with all of you recently at the BIFMA 360 Leadership Conference in St. Petersburg. As I looked out at the audience, I saw an industry that is right in the thick of it—navigating massive volatility, global shifts, and a fundamental transformation in how we make things.

We covered a lot of ground together. We talked about the acceleration of robotics and AI, the maturity of 3D printing, and the virtualization of the entire manufacturing process through digital twin technology.

My goal on stage was to shake up your thinking and give you a practical vision for a world that is evolving faster than ever before.

To do that, you'll remember I took us on a journey to the year 2035 to build a hypothetical product. For those who wanted a refresher on the specifics of that scenario, here is the deep dive we took into the future.

I'm also sharing iwth you a short video that looks at a bit of the what I covered on stage.

THE FUTURESTORY

REVISITING PROJECT AURA (2035)

I asked you to imagine it is January 26, 2035. You receive a client request from a global biotech firm needing a "hyper-responsive" workspace for a remote executive team.

They didn't just want a desk; they wanted a desk/chair ecosystem that adapts physically to stress levels and projects remote colleagues as 3D holograms.

I called it "Project Aura," and here is the 10-step roadmap we used to bring it to life:

1. The Cognitive Brief. We started with data, not sketches. We input executive biometric stress patterns into an AI engine, which instantly generated 500 geometric variations designed specifically to lower cortisol levels and enable remote intimacy.

2. The Virtual Review. We moved to "designing before committing." Before a single piece of material was cut, the client experienced the product via a digital twin. We performed real-time iterations—adjusting a privacy screen the moment the client felt it was "too enclosing." They signed off on the digital asset immediately.

CEO LEADERSHIP MEETINGS

"I help CEOs and executive leaders achieve their strategic objectives by aligning their organizations to a disruptive, accelerating future. It's powerful leadership insight based on detailed, specific industry trends – delivered within a fast-paced keynote with a compelling motivational style!"

– Jim Carroll

3. The Digital Twin Simulation. We proved viability before manufacturing. We ran a simulated 50,000-hour product lifecycle to stress-test bio-responsive fibers and verify the structure under heavy projector loads. We created the real product before it was real.

4. Resilient "Green" Sourcing. Your client demanded values-based sourcing. Our AI sourcing agents rejected high-risk, high-carbon suppliers, opting instead for verified recycled ocean plastics backed by a blockchain ledger to guarantee provenance.

5. Prototyping the Impossible. Using Gel-Supported Additive Manufacturing, we printed gravity-defying organic shapes that were once impossible to manufacture. We scanned the physical prototype and auto-corrected it against the Digital Twin.

FOR MORE INFO ON JIM CARROLL

SPEAKINC.COM

RGIBBONS@SPEAKINC.COM

THE FUTURE STORY

REVISITING PROJECT AURA (2035) (CONT'D)

6. The "Phygital" Interface. We built a "phygital" product—embedding technology directly into the furniture. The desk surface became the screen with holographic "Project Ghost" technology, and "Smart Thread" sensors in the fabric monitored biometrics to automatically adjust desk height.

7. The Swarm Factory. On the factory floor, linear assembly lines were gone. We used a "swarm factory" approach where robotics moved parts autonomously, humanoid robots routed electronics, and cobots augmented human assembly dexterity.

8. Quality Assurance Vision Audit. We ensured perfection using AI machine vision. The system detected microscopic flaws in real-time, comparing the physical unit against its Digital Twin and creating a digital "birth certificate" for the unit.

9. "White Glove" Delivery. To reduce emissions, we assembled the product in a local micro-factory. Delivery was executed using AR glasses to guide precise installation based on room scan data.

10. Lifecycle Product-as-a-Service. Finally, the sale didn't end at delivery. We established a predictive maintenance contract, where sensors dispatched technicians before parts failed, preventing e-waste and keeping the technology current.

My Challenge to You: What Now?

As I said on stage, this might sound like science fiction, but every single component of that story is already here in some form. The future is coming at you faster than you think.

We are seeing a massive acceleration in industrial IoT, vision-based quality control, and supply chain optimization. This shift means you need to prepare for a new workforce. You aren't just hiring for today's factory; you need to be looking for data quality analysts, machine learning engineers, AI ethics officers, and collaborative robotics specialists.

Don't Get Stuck in the "Barbell." I warned you about the "barbell structure" forming in the industry. On one end, you have advanced giants pouring money into R&D and automation. On the other, you have lagging suppliers stuck with legacy equipment and limited digital skills. If you don't move, you risk being the hollowed-out middle. You cannot hold yourselves back just because you think you are "too small" to innovate.

K**ill the Innovation Killers.** To move forward, you have to kill the excuses. You know the ones I mean because you hear them in your meetings: "We've always done it this way," "It won't work," "It's a dumb idea," or "The boss won't go for it." These are innovation killers.

You have to shift your mindset from why you can't do something to why you must do it.

WATCH JIM'S SUMMARY VIDEO!

SHARED BY BIFMA

AVAILABLE ON YOUTUBE!

THE FUTURE STORY

Invest in Experiential Capital. This was perhaps my most important advice to you: Invest in Experiential Capital. This is the accumulated experience you get simply by trying to work with digital twins, 3D printing, and IoT. You can't just read about it; you have to do it.

How do you build it?

Build an 'Xbox Room': I've seen organizations take a group of 25-year-old engineers, throw them in a room, give them a stack of cash, and give them the latest digital tools. They basically say to them, "We know this is important, but we don't understand it. You figure it out and tell us where we need to go." You need to align yourself with this generative capital because the younger generation will take you into the future.

Waste Time on Frivolous Things: You need to chase serendipitous innovation. You need to explore this new world not because there is an immediate ROI, but to build your understanding.

Assess Your Skill Set: As Steve Jobs famously said, we need the rebels, the outliers, the misfits. Shake up your skill set. Hire people who are different from you to take you into this fast-moving future.

Think Big, Start Small, Scale Fast! I'll leave you with the mantra I closed with, which is the only way to survive in this era: Think BIG about where the future of manufacturing is going. Start small with pilot projects to build that experiential capital. Scale fast—because in this era, a trend can go supernova and change an entire industry overnight.

It was a pleasure spending time with you.

Let's stay in touch as you move forward into the future.

I would be eager to assist you further by coming in and sharing my inisght at your own corporate leadership meetings.

Reach out to Rich Gibbons at Speak Inc to learn more! And if you like, come join me in my virtual broadcast studio for a further discussion

Be Sure to Watch My Recap Video

youtube.com/jimcarroll