

# Tom Mudano's work ethic means more opportunities for Tampa Bay

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Tom Mudano, executive director, AmSkills

NOLA LALEYE

By [Henry Queen](#) – Reporter, Tampa Bay Business Journal – December 3, 2021

**Tom Mudano** is president and CEO of AmSkills, a nonprofit that connects individuals with local manufacturing employers.

But his real role is much bigger.

Mudano is essentially the chief promoter of the Tampa Bay manufacturing industry, reminding anyone who will listen that the region has the most manufacturing employers in Florida. The week before a virtual chat with the Tampa Bay Business Journal, he visited Tallahassee to discuss workforce training funding with legislators. Those conversations were productive; Mudano expects Sen. **Ed Hooper** and Rep. **Amber Mariano** to file bills to expand a high school training program.

The American education system fails to prepare students for opportunities in the manufacturing sector, Mudano said. Classes with hands-on experience are rare. AmSkills seeks to change that by taking a German-style apprenticeship program and adapting it to local needs.

Before joining AmSkills in 2015, Mudano worked in both the public and private sectors. This interview was edited for clarity.

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**How would you say your previous roles have prepared you?** Most of the things that I've done in my life were creating things out of nothing. When I worked for the city of Clearwater for 15 years, I had seven promotions. All were jobs that were actually created within the city, which is not easy to do in government. But essentially, I was able to create a lot of different things in the city that hadn't been done before.

From there, I became an owner's rep, where I managed construction projects. I've worked in business, I've worked in nonprofits and I've worked in government. All of those experiences really were unique and helped me to prepare for this current position I have at AmSkills.

**When you were with the government in Clearwater, were those roles something that you pinpointed as needs, or was that something they said, 'Hey, we need this new role and here's the opportunity for you'?** Several of them were ones that I had identified. So for instance, straight out of college, I had to do an internship and there were no programs for the disabled at the city. So I did a survey, started up some pilot programs and hoped that they would hire me. I was told that they wouldn't. Then once I completed my internship, they hired me part time and then I went full time.

So really, again, I created [something] that had not previously existed.

**So almost entrepreneurial, but within a system?** Yeah. For instance [in the 1980s], I had the first computer that any employee really ever had out in the field in the department I was in. So I went out and got donations in order to buy it.

**Were there any inspirations from your dad on your career?** (Frank Mudano was a longtime architect who designed malls throughout Tampa Bay) Yes and no. I was born in St. Petersburg. I was adopted and I grew up in Clearwater. My parents were actually divorced when I was 3 years old, but every weekend, I got to go visit my dad. Every summer I worked at his office.

So I think it has a lot to do with not just my dad, but my mom as well. I grew up with a very strong work ethic. At 8 years old, I was cutting yards. I couldn't even pull the starter.

**Would you say that AmSkills is the culmination of all these years of work, and then also the result of something that you see as a desperate need not only in Tampa Bay but across the country?** It was actually created as a German-style apprenticeship training program. When I first got into it, I wasn't familiar with it. I did get the chance to travel to Germany and Switzerland to learn more about it.

I've really learned that you can't take Germany and put it here in the U.S. We have a different culture. But bottom line, [there are] so many young people who don't have any career guidance at a young age, and they don't have any chance to explore different careers. How many people do you know have a college degree that they're not using? It's because they probably didn't have a chance to figure out what they really want to do.

So that's what's great about AmSkills is we're helping not only kids but also 18 and up to really explore different careers and figure out which is the best one for them. That's very rewarding.

**If you could send one message to decision-makers in business or politics who are grappling with upheaval in parts of the manufacturing world, especially along the Appalachian region, what would you say?** We know that the manufacturing industry and others need skilled people, but you have to start thinking differently in the way to recruit them. You have to be creative. That's what we are doing at AmSkills.

Many years ago, there were a lot of jobs that were outsourced to other countries, and that meant layoffs for a lot of people. But the pandemic showed us that we need to bring manufacturing back to the U.S. because we can't necessarily rely on other countries to help produce our products.

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## Up close

- **Name, title:** Tom Mudano, president and CEO of AmSkills
- **Education:** B.S., Western Carolina University, A.S., St. Petersburg Junior College
- **Favorite hidden gem in Tampa Bay:** Starkey Market
- **Favorite sports movie:** "Rudy"
- **Best book you've read in the past year:** "The 4 Disciplines of Execution," by Chris McChesney, Sean Covey and Jim Huling
- **Best audiobook:** "The Compound Effect," by Darren Hardy
- **Favorite travel destination:** North Carolina mountains
- **Family life:** He and his wife of 32 years have a daughter, a son and a granddaughter

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### Day in the life of Tom Mudano

● Sleep ● Personal time ● Work

