

Annual Report

At most family reunions, everyone gets along, everyone puts on a good face, and everyone celebrates their togetherness. The AGMA annual convention held at the end of April was a lot like that.

After all, I've been a member, going to these annual meetings, since 1987, 31 years ago. The overall sentiment I heard from gear manufacturers who attended was that business is very good in the gear industry. Much of that has to do with continued high levels of production in the automotive industry. As one of the major gear cutting tool manufacturers told me, they can't produce the cutting tools fast enough. At least in that sector, a lot of gears are being cut.

And even those who aren't directly involved in the automotive industry seemed to be in a good mood. Maybe that's just the effect of the annual convention. Most everybody in the gear industry knows each other. They get together once a year and it's like a family reunion.

At most family reunions, everyone gets along, everyone puts on a good face, and everyone celebrates their togetherness. The AGMA annual convention is a lot like that. But often at family reunions, there are also some uncomfortable topics that nobody really wants to talk about. I sensed a little of that at the convention, too.

In our case, it isn't about skeletons in the closet or things that have happened in the past. It's about the things that *could* happen in the near future. There is definitely some apprehension in the air, particularly surrounding politics and international affairs. Things happening in Korea, Iran, Russia — and yes, here in the USA — could affect the global gear industry in a variety of ways. The U.S. steel tariffs have already driven up prices of raw materials, and the real worry is that the worst is yet to come.

The fact is, even though business is good for most, there are a lot of potential destabilizing factors that are keeping more than a few gear manufacturers awake at night.

Of course, one of the biggest factors is the one we haven't talked about yet: finding skilled workers.

I spoke to one plant manager who described some of his struggles. Recently, he'd begun training a new machine operator. This individual was dedicated, motivated to learn and responsible. It seemed that things were going well, until one day one of the machines crashed that the new operator was running.

"It was my fault," the manager said. Despite the new operator's diligence and attention, he lacked the basic mathematics to understand some of the parameters he was entering. "I've got to do a better job of teaching him."



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Fortunately, the AGMA is here to help. In fact, the AGMA's educational efforts were one of the most consistent themes of the convention, and I'm pleased to say that the AGMA continues to increase its offerings and improve its programs. Many of these are geared toward training plant floor personnel. President Matt Croson detailed the AGMA's plans to revamp and overhaul the AGMA Gear School program at Daley College in Chicago, as well as increasing partnerships with other organizations that can help in the training effort.

The good news is AGMA classes are available to both members and non-members. For AGMA members, some of the offerings are free. Examples include the Online Workforce Training Series ("Fundamentals of Gearing," "Hobbing," and "Parallel Gear Inspection") and the extensive collection of recorded webinars available online (more than a dozen different titles).

If you have operators or engineers you'd like to train, the AGMA is a great resource. There's no excuse not to take advantage of some of these programs, especially if your company is an AGMA member.

Also, don't forget about the GT LIBRARY, available for free at www.geartechnology.com. More than 11,000 users per month visit this section of the website to read articles from our magazine. It's easy to find what you're looking for. For example, just type "basics" into the search box, and you'll see a plethora of high-quality articles suitable for helping your next generation of engineers and operators understand the technology.

A lot of the things that worry us are beyond our control. But this one isn't. If you want to keep the good times rolling, you *must* train your people. When they are performing at the highest level, your company will, too. And next year when it's time again for our extended family reunion, you'll have lots of success stories to share.