

It's Not Your Father's Gear Business

The world is changing.

I've just returned from the AGMA Annual Meeting in Scottsdale, AZ. Like always, it was a great opportunity to visit with peers, colleagues, customers and competitors in the gear industry. But this year's event was far more than just a chance to reunite with old friends.

No, this year's annual meeting was also a wake-up call.

In addition to the usual presentations by speakers with expertise in management, manufacturing and international trade, attendees also heard from experts on artificial intelligence, blockchain, cybersecurity and cloud computing.

You might think those are just high-end concepts that will never have any connection to what happens on your shop floor every day. Those are just the latest buzzwords, you think – the phrases people throw around at cocktail parties to make themselves sound smarter and more sophisticated than you.

But you'd be wrong. These things are coming, and over the next decade, they're going to have a meaningful impact on manufacturing – even in stolid old industries like gear manufacturing. These things may not be important today, but they're going to grow in importance every day, especially as more powerful computers and faster communication protocols become embedded in every aspect of society. (Did I forget to mention 5G? It's coming, too, and not just to homes and cities. Factories might be one of the biggest benefactors of that technology over the next few years.)

I don't claim to understand much about what these experts talked about. I don't know exactly what blockchain, for example, will mean to your business. But after hearing from the speakers at the annual meeting, I'm convinced now that it *will* mean something, and so will the rest of these seemingly esoteric concepts. You probably won't understand them either. No offense, but if you're reading this, you're probably too old.

We need to turn these concepts over to the next generation, the people who've grown up in a connected society. Knowledge



Publisher & Editor-in-Chief
Michael Goldstein

and experience used to start at the top and trickle down in an organization. Now, these important concepts will likely start at the bottom and work their way upwards. The most recent hires, right out of school, grew up in the digital age and are already wired for digital communication. You need to make use of their expertise in ways you haven't even thought of.

Exploring these new frontiers might also be a great way to attract more young people to our industry. Even those who've shown no interest in the dirty, noisy gear business might perk up when you tell them you're on the cutting edge of industrial cybersecurity.

These young people are the ones who are going to figure out the next industrial revolution. And you need to let them. You have to get them involved, sooner rather than later. Send them to AGMA meetings. Introduce them to organizations like MxD (www.mxdusa.org), where these ideas are being applied to manufacturing today. Give them the opportunity to study these ideas, experiment with them and see how they might fit into your business.

Not only will this give your organization a better understanding of the technologies that will shape your future, but it will also give your young employees something to be excited about. It will help them become invested in your business and learn about its intricacies.

I'd like to thank the AGMA for bringing some of these ideas to the forefront of gear manufacturers' minds, not only at the annual meeting, but in their overall approach. The association is heavily focused on helping gear manufacturers gain the insight and understanding of how to stay competitive in this changing landscape. Being a member of the association – and more importantly, being involved – is perhaps more important than it's ever been.

If you haven't looked at the AGMA's offerings lately, I'd say you're long overdue. But don't look for yourself. Figure out how to get the young people in your organization involved. After all, they're the ones who are going to transform your business.

