

# The Do-It-Yourself Mentality

**Finding capable, dependable machinists is one of the great challenges of modern manufacturing.**

Most gear manufacturers we talk to would hire more machine operators—if only they could find them. They lament the fact that their workforce is getting older and grayer, and they don't know what to do.

Just mention the word “Millennial” and the old timers will roll their eyes. The younger generation doesn't have the same work ethic, they say. Millennials are more interested in making YouTube videos and growing their Instagram following than they are in holding a steady job. It's like they're expecting society to just take care of them.

Huh.

It occurs to me that, collectively, we're all doing the same thing. We're waiting for someone else to solve the workforce problem for us. Granted, it's a big problem, and changing the attitudes and expectations of students, parents, school counselors and young workers seems like an overwhelming task. What difference can one manufacturer make?

The answer is quite a lot, actually. At AGMA's recent Strategic Resources Network (SRN) meeting, held in May at MxD in Chicago, one of the presenters was Dave Hataj, president of Edgerton Gear. Hataj talked about a unique pre-apprenticeship program he developed and which is transforming the way manufacturers in Edgerton, Wisconsin are attracting, training and retaining young people to the workforce.

Hataj's program, *Craftsman with Character*, is a pre-apprenticeship program he developed to rescue what he calls the “lost shop kids” — the high school students who enjoy working with their hands but who might not be cut out for a university education. The program includes a partnership with the local high school, and students attend class at Edgerton Gear (or another local manufacturer) for 90 minutes each weekday. Four days are spent job shadowing, allowing students to follow a mentor and be immersed in a culture while gaining knowledge about a trade. The remaining day offers classroom instruction, where students explore their life goals and are encouraged to recognize their unique gifts and talents.

Hataj says the program has helped transform his business. It turns out that the act of mentoring young people has the tendency to bring out better character traits in those doing the mentoring, he says. As a result, the business performs better. More importantly, a third of Edgerton's staff is now under the age of thirty — quite a different situation from the company makeup before the program began.



**Publisher & Editor-in-Chief**  
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Complete details about the *Craftsman with Character* program are available from the organization's website ([www.craftsmanwithcharacter.org](http://www.craftsmanwithcharacter.org)). You can see videos describing the program, including testimonials from manufacturers, educators and students. You can see the course outline. And you can find out more about how you can start the program in your area.

The success of the program at Edgerton Gear is proof that you can make a difference. But if you're not ready to start a full-blown pre-apprenticeship program at your facility, there are still other ways to help yourself.

One of those ways is the AGMA Foundation's *Get Into Gears* employee recruitment toolkit. This free kit was created for anyone who is looking to promote the gear industry as a viable career path in order to recruit new employees. Companies or individuals interested, can download the kit at [www.agmafoundation.org/getintogears](http://www.agmafoundation.org/getintogears).

The toolkit includes a variety of marketing pieces you can use to attract qualified applicants to your business. They include a PowerPoint presentation, social media and e-mail graphics, a promotional video, a brochure, posters, postcards and advertisement templates. Print materials can be customized with your company name and contact information, and are meant to be customized to your needs.

The AGMA Foundation has done a lot of work for you, so there's really no reason not to at least download the materials, adapt them and make them available to the people who do the hiring at your company. Maybe it's time to reach out to the local high schools, technical colleges and trade schools. Maybe you should participate in local job fairs. When you do, these materials will help you sell the advantages of working in the gear industry.

Solving the workforce problem won't come easy. We have a long way to go. But as manufacturers, you know that it takes dedication, hard work and commitment to build something of value. What are you waiting for?