

GUEST EDITORIAL

A REAL TEST



It is often easy for those outside of the gear industry to get the impression that nothing is changing in our business. After all, as illustrated bimonthly by the covers of this very journal, the making of gears has been with us for centuries. However, nothing could be further from the truth.

As this year's AGMA president, and for many years a chairman of a technical committee, I've seen firsthand the rapid changes that are occurring.

Technical advances, as reported either in this publication or through the publications and meetings of AGMA, have driven the marketplace. The demand for better gears at lower costs has tested our abilities in design, manufacture and application. It has been a real test of our engineering capabilities.

In recent years, there have been other tests of our abilities. External forces keep poking their noses into the engineering tent, testing our ability to compete in an economic environment that often times is neither stable nor fair. Life would be much simpler if the test was just to design and make the best gears.

Some domestic markets have faded as a result of advances in technology. An example can be seen on our own shop floors, where gear generating machine tools have far fewer, if any, gears in them. What was once a part of our industry's market has all but disappeared. Other domestic markets have fallen prey to changing international economies. Gear manufacturers once had a healthy business supplying the American steel industry, and global oil prices have severely reduced our market in the U.S. "oil patch."

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Add to this the fact that the U.S. government, regardless of good or bad intentions, has hindered our own efforts to compete. Tax codes, product liability laws, government procurement policies and a long list of other issues have added to our challenge of doing business in today's environment. Some of the forces from outside our plants are ones that we can do little about. For others, there is a chance of ultimately correcting the problem, particularly through our Association. But in either case, this changing environment places greater emphasis on our ability to stay abreast of the latest technology. To compete both domestically and internationally, regardless of the myriad of other constraints, we have to be on the leading edge of our technology.

That's something we can control. We can attend conferences and technical meetings. In AGMA, we hold about 50 sessions per year, described by some as "the best continuing education program available." Most of these are the standards writing committee meetings. Although such committee meetings are working sessions to develop new national standards, they also provide one of the best forums to define state-of-the-art technology. We can also read journals and technical papers. Papers and journals from AGMA, ASME and other societies and publications like *Gear Technology* are only a few of the resources we have commonly available to us.

The point is that we have to make the effort. We have to recognize that as our world changes, it places greater emphasis on our ability to apply the best engineering and technical ideas available. Only in this way can we meet the challenges from our domestic and foreign competitors, as well as those from our economy and government.

That will be the real test of our engineering abilities.

Daniel E. Bailey

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Dan Bailey".

President
AGMA