



The Graying of the Gear Industry

The gear industry is getting old, fast.

I was struck by that fact at Gear Expo, where most of the people I saw at the show had gray or white hair.

Of course, I'm not telling you anything you don't already know. More and more people in the industry have told me they've tried to retire, but their companies keep offering them incentives to stay on—as consultants or part-timers—whatever it takes to keep them working.

A similar group of people probably work at your own company. They've spent decades figuring out the best ways to make your products or your customers' products. In fact, if you're reading this, there's a good chance you're one of them.

Who will help your company solve gear manufacturing problems when you retire? Are we training enough of another generation of Americans to take over when the time comes? Who is motivating young people to pursue careers in manufacturing and engineering?

When I was a little boy, I used to take things apart and try to put them back together again to figure out how they worked. I have always had an inclination toward

and curiosity about machines and mechanical processes, as I suspect is the case with most of you. Around age 8 or 9, I was fortunate enough to go on a school field trip to the Ford assembly plant in Chicago. I remember being awed by seeing all those parts coming together and, at the end of the line, a guy jumping into the car, turning the key, and driving a finished automobile off the line. I was fascinated. It was an experience that helped focus my interest in engineering.

We need something similar to inspire and encourage the kids of today. The kids are no different, but we are.

We live in a service-oriented economy. Most people are too far removed to even know what happens in a manufacturing plant. Automobiles come from dealers, washing machines come from stores—with never a thought of how or where they're made. People know what doctors or lawyers do. But manufacturing engineers? Many of you work at state-of-the-art manufacturing facilities with clean floors, fresh air, good lighting, and machines that work by themselves, but most people have a 1940s vision of factories—dark, noisy, smelly and dangerous, with no future for those who worked there. Teachers,

parents and school counselors are totally disconnected from the reality of manufacturing today and how rewarding a career in manufacturing can be.

You may think you're not in a position to help. But you don't have to be the company president to come up with ideas to change how our kids think about manufacturing. Do you know of any youth groups who could benefit from exposure to the real world of manufacturing? What about your local schools, scout groups, etc.? Can you arrange to invite them to come and tour your facility? If that doesn't work, can you go and visit them? Give a presentation. Show them pictures. Do something.

Getting kids interested in manufacturing as a career isn't just a smart move that could provide future employees for your company. It's an investment in our country.

Most of you already understand the importance of a strong manufacturing base to our nation's economy, defense and overall welfare. We simply cannot afford to allow all of our manufacturing know-how to disappear when the current generation of experts retires. Remember, when you retire, your welfare—and your nation's welfare—will be dependent upon the skills of the next generation. Will you feel comfortable in your retirement knowing that your country has lost the ability to



Is this how people think of factories? The gear industry has come a long way since this photo, taken in 1945 at the Massey Harris gear plant in Racine, WI. In the far background, leaning against a machine, is Harold Goldstein, the author's father.

make things for itself?

There are a lot of 8- or 9-year-olds out there—some with the right curiosity to be engineers, production managers, CNC programmers, shop foremen or six sigma black belts. It's a shame they don't know those possibilities exist.

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P.S. If you or your company are doing anything to help encourage young people to consider manufacturing careers, we'd like to hear about it. Send your letters to publisher@geartechnology.com