

Gravy Training



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We've just come off a very strong year for gear manufacturing, and most of you are looking forward to another good year in 2019. At least, that's what the results of our annual State-of-the-Gear-Industry survey tell us.

Every year, we survey the gear manufacturing community to find out the current trends in production, sales, employment and the overall mood. Even though we're probably approaching the end of our long period of economic expansion, even though the global trade wars are impacting our material prices, and even though we're struggling—like all manufacturing industries—to find, train and keep skilled labor, the overall mood seems higher than it's been in some time.

For the most part, it's still good to be a gear manufacturer.

According to the survey, roughly 86% of you are optimistic about your company's ability to compete over the next five years. That's a slight increase from the 83.6% who were optimistic last year. More importantly, there's been a significant shift toward extreme optimism. The number who are extremely optimistic more than doubled since last year's survey (going from 18.7% in 2018 to 38.6% in this year's survey). This tells me that for a lot of you, business is really, really good.

And our data says that trend should continue. More than two-thirds of gear manufacturing operations saw production volumes increase in 2018, and more than two-thirds also expect product to increase further in 2019. The same is true of sales. You can see the full results of the survey beginning on page 22.

But don't stop after you've finished reviewing the survey results. In order to give you a more complete picture of the state of the gear industry, we've also tapped a number of industry experts to get their opinions on the most important trends and issues facing gear manufacturers today. In a special edition of "Ask the Expert" (page 34), we've compiled and presented those ideas for you.

By far, the most important trend identified – both by our survey and by the individual experts who've weighed in – is the skilled labor shortage. It's an enormous problem with no easy solution. We need skilled machinists. We need people at every level trained in the basics of gear theory. We need people who understand gear inspection, gear design and heat treating.

The AGMA also recognizes this as the No. 1 challenge facing our industry, and the association is working hard on solutions. A few months ago, we talked with AGMA President Matthew Croson about some of the association's current projects, including the AGMA Foundation's "Get Into Gears" program that's aimed at helping individual companies attract talent to their organizations. In our interview, Croson also talked about the soon-to-be-unveiled AGMA National Training Center at Daley College in Chicago. If you haven't already done so, I invite you to watch the entire interview on *Gear Technology TV* (www.geartechnology.com/tv/). You should also visit www.agma.org and click on "Education," because the association offers a wide variety of in-person and online training, both for members and non-members.

Of course, we try to do our part every issue as well, by providing technical information the industry can use. This issue is no exception, with our focus on big gears and our coverage of multifunctional machining. More importantly, we have our *GT LIBRARY* online, where you can go and read archived articles any time to learn about everything from the basics to the state of the art. All the past articles are indexed in a keyword-searchable database, so all you have to do is use the site's internal search engine to find an article on any gear-related subject. In fact, I'd encourage you to guide any new employees to the *GT LIBRARY* and invite them to type in "basics." They'll find plenty of good reading material from our more than 34 years of publishing to get them started.

Times are good in the gear industry. But they won't continue unless we address the skilled labor problem. What looks like a gravy train today can't possibly continue unless we figure out how to attract people to our industry, and then give them the training that allows them to progress from the basics to intermediate skills and even expertise.

Let's keep those good times rolling.