

We'd Grow Faster If We Could

It's probably no surprise to anyone that the majority of the gear industry had a pretty good year in 2017, and that most gear manufacturers are expecting a pretty good 2018 as well. After all, most major economic indicators—including the ones that focus on the manufacturing sector—have been positive for some time.

For example, according to the Institute for Supply Management, the Purchasing Managers Index (PMI) registered at 59.7% in December 2017, the 16th consecutive month the index has indicated growth in the manufacturing industry. According to the Association for Manufacturing Technology (AMT), manufacturing technology orders were up 9.4% through the first 11 months of 2017.

But it's nice to have reassurance that comes from closer to home, especially when we operate in such a specialized industry. That's why *Gear Technology's* annual State-of-the-Gear-Industry survey is so important. And the survey confirms what most of us have been feeling—that the world still needs gears.

The full results of our survey are presented in the article beginning on page 30 of this issue. If you study the results, you'll see that 70% of gear manufacturers saw production volume increase in 2017, and even more (77%) expect production to increase further in 2018. The same is true of sales, with 68.6% reporting an increase in 2017, and 73.5% expecting an increase in 2018.

From these numbers, it seems like 2017 was a strong year for the gear industry, and 2018 looks to be even stronger. Unfortunately, all of that projected growth is not a guaranteed result. You need people to make it happen. And not just any people: You need skilled labor.

And that's the problem. You get the sense that the gear industry could show even more impressive gains if it could grow its skilled workforce. We've been talking about this for more than a decade. I don't want to be an alarmist, but every year, we seem to get closer and closer to a state of crisis.

In this year's survey, nearly 80% of respondents say their companies are currently experiencing a shortage of skilled labor. In the open-ended responses, which you can read on page 31, finding skilled labor was by far the most commonly cited challenge. Clearly, this is the No. 1 issue facing our industry today by a wide margin.

So what should we do about it? Many of you are already working on solutions. Two-thirds of your companies are already working with local educational institutions to help develop or train employees. Over half have mentoring programs in place for new hires. But according to



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the survey, only about 45% of you work for companies that regularly send employees to gear-related training seminars or courses.

Shouldn't that number be much closer to 100%?

After all, there are plenty of opportunities available, starting with the AGMA, which has expanded its educational offerings considerably over the past couple of years. Their *Basic Training for Gear Manufacturing* course is a hands-on, face-to-face class that combines classroom instruction with shop floor time using manual machines to better demonstrate the fundamentals. The next session is in April. You can sign up at www.agma.org. AGMA also offers a wide variety of in-person and online courses to meet a wide variety of skill levels and needs, including gear design, metallurgy, inspection, failure analysis and more. Go to their website and click on "Education." If you haven't been there in a while, you'll probably be surprised by how much is offered.

Besides AGMA, there are plenty of other options as well. Most of the major gear machine tool manufacturers offer webinars and seminars throughout the year, as well as in-person training. Considering that "Machining Best Practices" is the type of training most needed by the gear industry (according to the survey), it makes sense to learn from the people who design the technology and have the broadest exposure to what your competitors and colleagues are doing around the world.

Finally, over the past year, Arvin Global Solutions has developed an extensive series of seminars for gear manufacturing training, utilizing a team of industry veterans who've been there, done that. You can see their schedule of upcoming seminars in their ad on page 55.

There are always lots of educational opportunities in our printed calendar each issue (see page 79), and even more posted on our website (www.geartechnology.com/events.htm).

Whatever you do, it's time to stop waiting for new, qualified employees to show up at your door looking for work. You have

to invest in your future by investing in theirs.