

Erosion of Knowledge

Have you ever stood on a beach at the edge of the water and felt the grains of sand dissolve from under your feet as the water recedes? No matter how hard you plant your feet or grip your toes, you can't hold on to the sand. It just flows away right from under you.

In many ways that sand is like knowledge and experience of our graying manufacturing workforce. It seems inevitable that much of that knowledge is being washed away.

The reason I'm waxing poetic — and thinking about beaches — is that I had lunch with an old friend the other day. Throughout most of his career (and mine), he's been the chief executive at a major gear manufacturing company. Well respected throughout the industry, he's recognized as a champion of U.S. manufacturing, having worked with industry, academia and government to ensure that America's manufacturing base remains strong — all in addition to running a top-notch manufacturing company.

This man has a passion for manufacturing, for *American* manufacturing, and for *American gear* manufacturing.

Now that he's officially "retired" from the company where he spent most of his career, my friend is moving on to the next phase of his life. Although he's well past the age when most people retire, he's far from being done. Unlike many, who become burned out after spending their careers in a single industry, this man is energized, enthusiastic and hopeful that he can still make a meaningful contribution. I admire him for these qualities and wish our industry had more people like him.

Instead of moving to the South and living on a beach somewhere, he's working hard to develop a new business based on everything he's learned over the years. He's in the process of building a consulting business, one composed of like-minded, well-experienced individuals who share his motivation to help American manufacturing companies compete on a global scale. He's drawing on his many contacts to assemble a team of professionals with a wide variety of talents that complement his own.

My friend doesn't believe that his accumulation of knowledge and many years of experience should just wash away when the tide goes out. Rather, he believes that his expertise should be used to fuel the next generation of manufacturing successes.



Publisher & Editor-in-Chief
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I'm not here to endorse my friend's new business, nor to tell you where to seek the manufacturing expertise that will help you succeed. But I *am* here to endorse his attitude, his passion and his commitment to our industry. These are things we could all use a little bit more of.

I don't have to tell you that the gear industry — like most of American manufacturing — is a graying industry. Irreplaceable knowledge and experience disappear every day, as the "old-timers" leave the ranks of our employed. These are people who have already made the thousands of mistakes that rookies to the business are likely to repeat. When these experts leave us, they take with them all of the experience, wisdom and judgment that they've acquired over the years. And if we just let them go, it's gone forever.

When I was much younger, I used to build sandcastles. It was always a challenge to build close to the water. That's where the sand was wettest and best for building. But it's also where your structure was in danger of demolition. So I erected shield walls, built moats and engineered other ways to keep the water from washing away my work.

In many ways, that's what I've been trying to do for nearly 31 years with *Gear Technology* — to build a repository of knowledge that's proof against time, to collect the wisdom and experience of generations of gear manufacturing experts and preserve them for the future. *Gear Technology* is my shield wall against the inevitable erosion of information.

Although he's doing so in a different way, my friend is also doing his part to help preserve the knowledge. If you share the same kind of passion for manufacturing that we do, then you should too. Tell us what you're doing to preserve *your* company's expertise for the next generation (publisher@geartechnology.com).

