

THE BIGGER PICTURE

I learned much of what I know about the machine tool business from my father, who learned it from his father before him. One of the lessons he taught was that no matter how important the details seem, it's equally important to look at the bigger picture.

For example, before I inspected a machine, I would study the catalogs and make lists of all the features and sizes that I had to check. My father would tell me that after completing my checklist, I should step back from the machine, walk around it, away from the details, and see it as a whole. He said forcing yourself to look from a bigger perspective often lets you see what you would otherwise miss.

Very often, he was right. Once, when I inspected a cylindrical grinder, I forgot this lesson. Somehow, I overlooked the fact that the machine was built special, without a reciprocating table—the bed and the table were one piece. I had covered all the details but overlooked what some might say was obvious. Sometimes the obvious is the hardest thing to see. Today I realize that using a bigger perspective allows me to see problems and opportunities I wasn't expecting to find or didn't think to look for.

I was reminded of my father's wisdom at this year's Gear Expo. As many of you know, Gear Expo is the worldwide gear industry's premier event, and it has grown with each incarnation. There were far more exhibitors at this show than we've ever seen before. This means more money for the AGMA, which translates into more and better services for the industry as a whole.

But while the number of exhibitors has grown, the number of visitors dropped dramatically this year. Most people view the show as a machine tool show—a place to see, compare and buy gear manufacturing equipment. When I was down on the show floor, walking through the aisles, this is how I saw it, too. But then I tried a different perspective.

The Nashville Convention Center, where Gear Expo was held, has a viewing area above the show floor. From there, you can see the entire show. While I was up there, it struck me that this was much more than a machine tool show. The full view of Gear Expo revealed to me the entire gear industry, all in one place. I realized that for four days, we had access to the finest gathering of gear talent anywhere in the world. From my perch above the show, I saw gear manufacturers, materials suppliers, software vendors, consultants and cutting tool manufacturers, all of them valuable business contacts with knowledge about gears. Of course, the machine tool manufacturers were there as well, not just with salespeople, but also with the engineers, tech-

nicians and field service people who develop, design, build and troubleshoot the machines. For those who felt they needed even more gear knowledge, SME offered a series of gear clinics at the show.

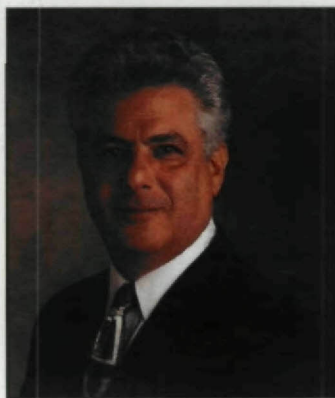
The value of these experiences cannot be overstated. The information, contacts and business opportunities made the trip to Nashville not only worthwhile, but essential to compete successfully in today's marketplace. By looking at Gear Expo as more than a collection of exhibitors, I was able to reap the benefits of everything the show had to offer. An opportunity not seen is an opportunity missed.

The gear industry is changing faster than ever, and access to information may be the key to success in the years to come. With this Millennium Outlook issue, we've tried to walk around the gear industry as if it were one of my father's machine tools. We've examined ourselves from different perspectives to see how other industries and global events have shaped the changes in our little industrial niche and how these factors will affect our future.

Our talks with some of the leaders in the gear industry have revealed how dependent we are on the rest of the world and, in some cases, how defenseless we are against it. The whims of economy, politics, war and industry can either carry us or bury us, depending on how quickly we adapt to change.

The pace of change will continue to accelerate in the coming years, and our industry will have to keep up with these changes in both traditional and novel ways. We must challenge

ourselves to view our companies and our industry with fresh eyes and from different points of view. We can't allow the comfortable, familiar perspective of our everyday routine to restrict what we're able to see, because what will seem obvious to us in the future is probably lost in the details of today.



A stylized, handwritten signature of Michael Goldstein in dark ink.

Michael Goldstein, Publisher and Editor-in-Chief