



SUSTAINING EXPERTISE in the GEAR INDUSTRY

One of the most talked-about subjects in manufacturing is sustainability. Motivated individuals are looking for ways to make their organizations more efficient, less wasteful and more environmentally responsible. Many manufacturing managers are looking at their energy consumption, water use and physical waste for ways they can reduce, reuse and recycle. The idea is to minimize waste and conserve vital resources.

Those who fully commit to the lean and green approach are almost always rewarded with more than the satisfaction of corporate responsibility. Their organizations become better, stronger—and most importantly, more profitable.

But there's one vital resource that's often overlooked. And although it has little to do with the green movement, it's one that's crucial for the continued success of any organization. The resource I'm referring to is expertise.

Unfortunately, expertise is also a resource that's hard to sustain. Because it's tied to the individuals who've earned it through experience and practical application, it tends to go away when they go away.

Employees are mobile. They leave, and they take their expertise with them. Or they retire—and this is an important factor for the gear industry, which has more than a little gray hair.

Every time I go to an industry event, I am alarmed at the aging of the gear industry's "go-to" guys. While there are plenty of younger engineers working in the gear industry, some of the best and most experienced minds in gearing are either approaching retirement or already retired. Most of the experts I've encountered are extremely grateful for their careers and their livelihoods, and they're eager to give back by sharing what they've learned with the next generation.

So if you have one of these experts in your organization, it behooves you to ensure that his or her knowledge and expertise is transferred to the next generation—before it's too late. You probably have plans in place to conserve other resources at your plant. But what are you doing to conserve knowledge? Do you have a mentoring program in place? Do you have a formal training program for younger engineers? Are your experts' best practices being codified into your company's written procedures? What are you doing to protect what may in fact be your most valuable resource?

This magazine was founded as a teaching journal. Our mission has always been to help the gear industry maintain a body of knowledge, so I like to think that all along, we've been doing our part as "The Gear Industry's Information Source." But over the past several issues, we've expanded that focus with the introduction of our "Ask the Expert" column. We take reader-submitted questions and put them before one or more experts. It's our way of sustaining the knowledge base.

The column has generated enormous interest and extremely positive feedback. Not surprisingly, many of you are dealing with challenging gear-related problems every day. You have questions about gear design, manufacturing, inspection, heat treating and more. Maybe there isn't an appropriate expert at your own company or within your circle of peers. Fortunately, our role as publisher puts us in a position to make acquaintances with a wide array of experts, starting with our roster of technical editors and extending to many of the world's most gifted and experienced gear engineers and researchers among our advertisers and other companies in the industry.

So if you have a question, we invite you to submit it. You can do so by following the "Ask the Expert" link on our home page (www.geartechnology.com). We'll track down the experts who can best answer it, and we'll help preserve their knowledge for the industry by presenting the most useful and relevant answers in our pages. And if you're one of those lucky few who have spent a career in the gear industry and want to give something back, we invite you to join our panel of experts. There's already a list of questions posted online that need your answers.

Whether you help us by contributing questions or answers, participating in the "Ask the Expert" column is a great way to help us ensure that the gear industry's body of knowledge continues to grow.

Michael Goldstein,

Publisher & Editor-in-Chief