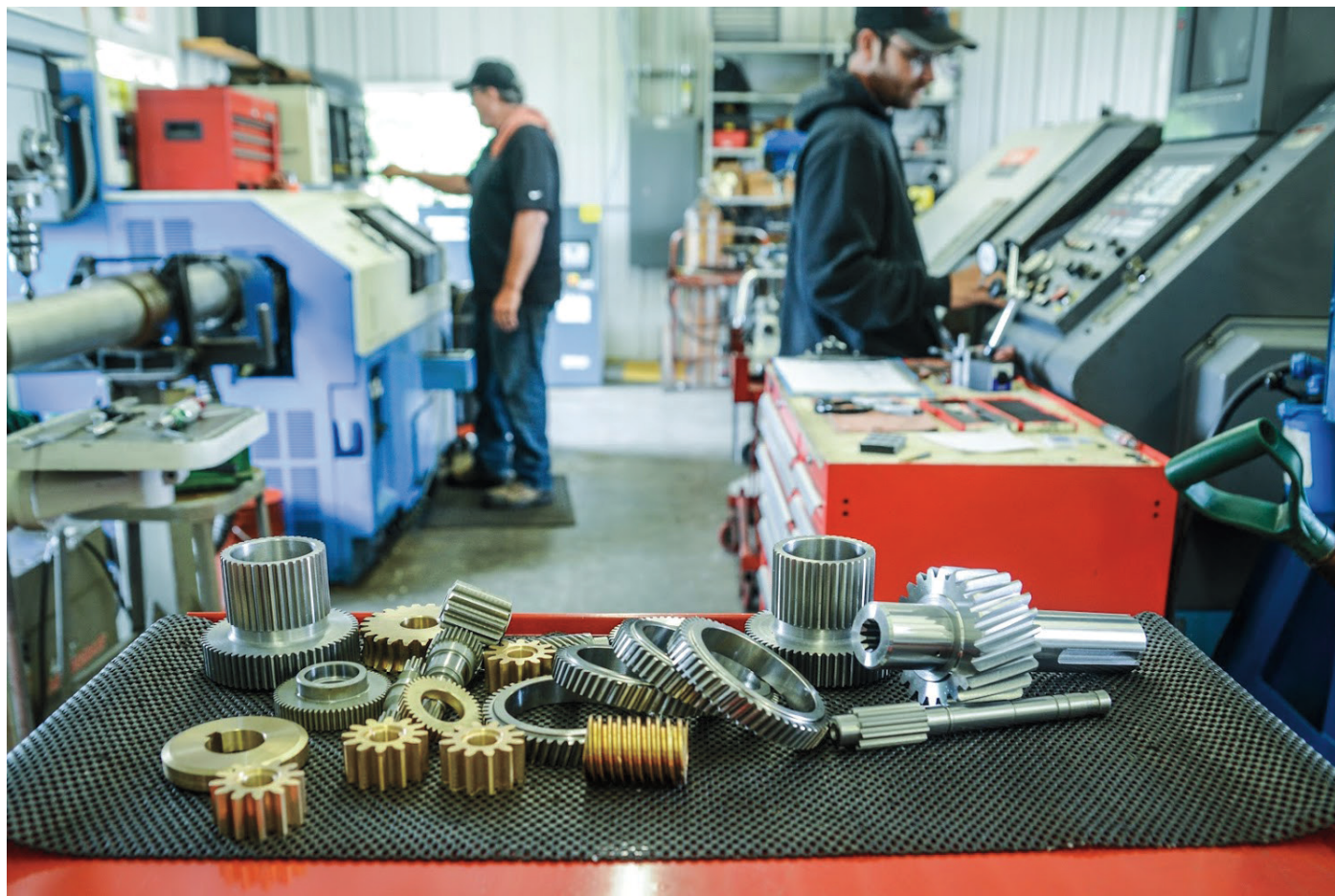


Gearing Up for Success

Transforming workplace culture in gear manufacturing

Lisa Ryan, Certified Speaking Professional



As you navigate the ever-evolving landscape of gear manufacturing, it's become increasingly clear that success isn't solely determined by the precision of your machines or the latest technological advancements. While these factors remain crucial, the true differentiator in today's competitive market lies in cultivating and nurturing your most valuable asset: your people.

Picture this: You're standing on your gear manufacturing floor, surrounded by the rhythmic hum of cutting-edge machinery and the gleam of freshly milled gears. You've invested in the

latest technology and top-notch equipment. Your team possesses the technical expertise to produce components that power clean energy solutions, drive vehicles safely across continents, and push the boundaries of what's possible in countless industries. Yet, something feels off. Despite all the precision in your gears, your workplace culture could use some fine-tuning.

In my years of working with manufacturers, I've seen this scenario play out time and time again. The solution isn't always about buying the newest machine or implementing

the latest software. Often, it's about something much more fundamental: how you treat each other and approach your work each day. It's about creating a culture that values both your machines' precision and your people's potential.

In this article, we're going to explore a framework that can transform your workplace culture and keep your team engaged, motivated, and loyal. We'll dive into six key areas that, when addressed, can make a significant difference in your day-to-day operations and long-term success.

The Six Gears of Grategy

1. Attitude: Your Foundation for Progress

In gear manufacturing, where microns make the difference between a smooth-running transmission and a noisy failure, attitude is the bedrock that supports everything else. It's not just about being positive; it's about being open to change and willing to see the real picture of what's happening in your plant.

Remember the introduction of advanced grinding technologies? Some saw it as a threat, while others viewed it as an opportunity to enhance their capabilities. The companies that thrived were those with leaders and teams who had the right attitude—open to new technologies and willing to adapt their processes.

To cultivate a productive attitude in your organization:

- **Embrace reality-based thinking.** Don't shy away from hard truths

about your operations. If your OEE (Overall Equipment Effectiveness) isn't where it should be, acknowledge it openly. This honesty creates a foundation for real improvement.

- **View challenges as opportunities for growth.** When faced with a difficult customer requirement, instead of thinking "We can't do that," ask "How can we make this work?" This shift in attitude often leads to innovative solutions and can even open up new market opportunities.
- **Lead by example.** As a leader, your attitude sets the tone for the entire organization. If you're resistant to change or unwilling to acknowledge problems, your team will follow suit. On the flip side, if you approach challenges with enthusiasm and a problem-solving mindset, you'll inspire your team to do the same.

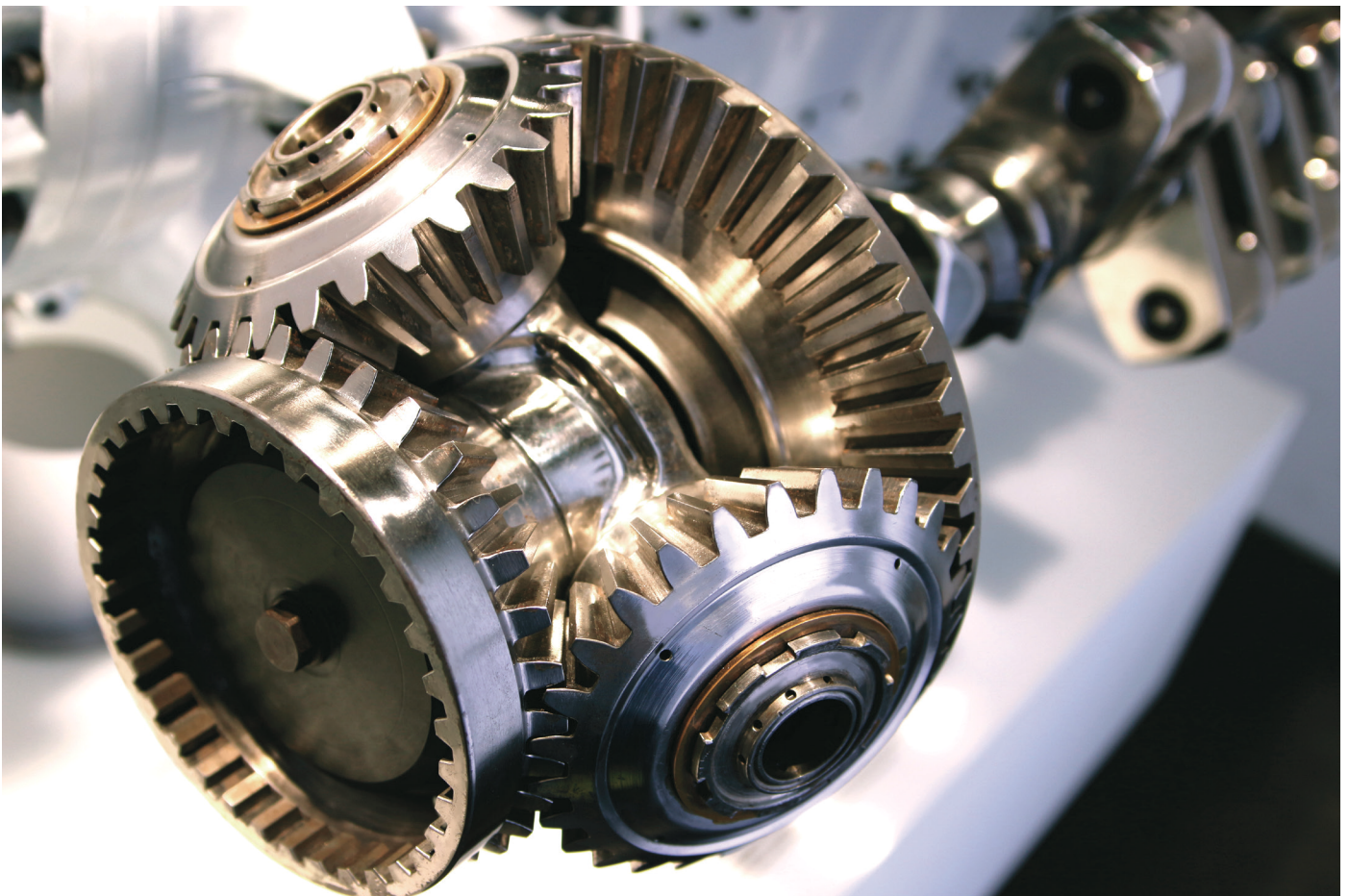
2. Appreciation: An Unexpected Tool for Operational Excellence

Appreciation, in this context, is about training your mind to find the good, no matter what's happening around

you. It's a powerful tool that can help you maintain a positive outlook even when facing the toughest challenges in your operations.

Try these three strategies to cultivate appreciation:

- **Start a daily gratitude journal.** At the end of each shift, write down three things that went well or that you're grateful for. It could be as simple as a machine that ran without a hitch, a problem you solved in a complex design, or a moment of clarity in a challenging project. This practice trains your brain to look for the positive, even on the toughest days.
- **Practice mindful observation.** Once a day, take a moment to truly observe your operation. Notice the precision of your machines, the skill of your operators, or the quality of your finished products. Appreciating these details can reignite your passion for the work and help you see your daily tasks in a new light.



- **Find gratitude in setbacks.** When things go wrong—and in manufacturing, they sometimes do—challenge yourself to find something to be grateful for. Perhaps a failure in a heat treatment process led to an important discovery, or a delay allowed time for an even better solution to emerge.

3. Access: Unlocking the Genius on Your Shop Floor

Here's a wild idea: The next big innovation in your gear shop might come from the person you least expect. That's what access is all about—creating an environment where ideas can flow freely, regardless of job title or years of experience.

Consider these approaches:

- **Implement an open-door policy.** Or better yet, a no-door policy. Make it easy for anyone to share ideas. This could mean regular walk-throughs where you engage with operators and ask for their input on process improvements.
- **Set up a suggestion box (physical or digital) where people can submit ideas anonymously.** Review these suggestions regularly and implement the best ones. Then, make sure to publicize the improvements and credit the innovators.
- **Hold regular brainstorming sessions.** Make them engaging—maybe over a pizza lunch. You'd be amazed at what people come up with when they're relaxed and feel heard. Topics could range from ways to reduce setup time to ideas for improving shop floor organization.

Remember, the person operating a gear grinding machine day in and day out often has insights that even the most experienced gear engineer might miss. By creating an environment of open access, you're tapping into a wealth of knowledge and creativity that could revolutionize your operations.





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4. Applause: Celebrating Success, One Component at a Time

In your world, you're often so focused on what went wrong (that tolerance that was off by a hair, that delivery that was 10 minutes late) that you forget to celebrate what went right. And that's a missed opportunity.

Here's how to start:

- **Did your team just complete a big order ahead of schedule?** Celebrate it! This could be as simple as a company-wide email acknowledging the achievement, or as elaborate as a catered lunch for the team.
- **Did someone figure out a way to reduce setup time on a tricky helical gear?** Shout it from the rooftops (or at least the shop floor)! Consider creating a "Wall of Fame" where innovative solutions are showcased.
- **Implement a peer recognition program.** Sometimes the best applause comes from colleagues. Set up a system where team members can nominate each other for outstanding work. This not only boosts morale but also encourages a culture of excellence and mutual respect.

Remember, in manufacturing, you're often dealing with tolerances that are invisible to the naked eye. But that doesn't mean your celebrations should be equally microscopic. By applauding successes, both big and small, you're reinforcing the behaviors and attitudes that drive your company forward.

5. Acts of Service: Manufacturing a Better Community

Community engagement isn't just about feeling good or boosting your PR. It's about crafting a future where your business can thrive. Think of it as precision community calibration.

Consider these approaches:

- **Partner with local schools for STEM programs.** You're not just helping kids; you're potentially manufacturing your future workforce. This could involve hosting field trips to your facility, sponsoring robotics teams, or offering internships to promising students.

- **Open your doors for facility tours.** You're not just showing off shiny machines; you're buffing away those old, rusty perceptions of manufacturing. Invite local business leaders, educators, and community members to see modern manufacturing in action.
- **Participate in local events.** It's about calibrating your business to the needs and values of your community. This could mean sponsoring a local sports team, participating in charity runs, or setting up a booth at community fairs to showcase the high-tech nature of modern gear manufacturing.

By engaging with your community, you're not just being a good corporate citizen. You're also addressing one of the biggest challenges facing your industry: the skills gap. By showing young people the exciting, high-tech nature of modern manufacturing, you're helping to ensure a pipeline of skilled workers for the future.

6. Accountability: The Secret Sauce of Excellence

In your world, accountability isn't about pointing fingers. It's about empowerment.

Here's how to build a culture of accountability:

- **Set clear expectations.** Make sure everyone knows not just what they're supposed to do, but why it matters. This goes beyond job descriptions. It's about helping each team member understand how their work contributes to the bigger picture.
- **Implement KPIs that truly reflect what's important—not just production numbers, but quality metrics, innovation goals, and customer satisfaction.** For example, track not only gears produced per hour, but also first-pass yield rates, customer returns, and on-time delivery percentages.
- **Make it safe to fail.** I know, in your business, failure can be costly. But if your team is afraid to try new things or speak up when they see a problem, you're missing out on potentially game-changing innovations. Create a culture where "fail fast, learn fast" is the norm.

Accountability also means recognizing and rewarding those who consistently meet or exceed expectations. This could involve performance-based

bonuses, opportunities for advancement, or simply public recognition of a job well done.

Manufacturing Your Stronger Future

As you implement these six gears, it's crucial to recognize the unique characteristics that will shape the 2025 workplace and beyond. Today's workforce is more digitally connected, culturally diverse, and values-driven than ever. Employees are not just looking for a paycheck; they seek purpose, growth, and a sense of belonging. This shift calls for a fresh approach to leadership—empathetic, flexible, and forward-thinking.

In this new landscape:

- **Connect work to a greater purpose:** Clearly communicate your company's mission and how each role contributes to it. Encourage employee input to foster a sense of ownership and pride in their work.
- **Invest in professional development:** Offer training programs and mentorship opportunities that help employees level up their skills. Regularly discuss career aspirations and provide support to achieve these goals.
- **Prioritize effective communication:** Ensure transparent and open communication at all levels. Set clear expectations and create an environment where feedback is not just welcomed but acted upon.
- **Create a positive work environment:** Ensure your team has the resources they need to succeed and promote a healthy work-life balance to keep stress at bay.
- **Show gratitude and appreciation:** Never underestimate the power of a 'thank you'. Use both verbal recognition and nonverbal gestures to make a big impact.
- **Understand the ripple effect of appreciation:** Recognize that a happy team leads to happy customers and lower turnover rates.
- **Embrace the manager's role in engagement:** Practice active listening to understand your team's needs and be adaptable to new strategies when necessary.

So there you have it—the Six Gears of Grategy. I know what you're

thinking. “Lisa, this all sounds great, but I’ve got gears to make and deadlines to meet.” I hear you. But here’s the thing: in today’s world, making great gears isn’t enough. To really succeed, to attract and keep the best talent, to stay ahead of the competition, you need more than just precision machines. You need a precision culture.

Remember, you’re not just making components. You’re making parts that power clean energy solutions, drive vehicles safely across continents, and push the boundaries of what’s possible in countless industries. That level of importance demands more than just technical skill. It demands a culture of excellence, innovation, and yes, gratitude.

Implementing these strategies isn’t always easy. It requires commitment, consistency, and sometimes, a willingness to step out of your comfort zone. But the payoff can be enormous. Imagine a workplace where problems are seen as opportunities, where innovation flows freely from all levels of the organization, and where every team member feels valued and understands their role in the bigger picture of gear manufacturing.

That’s the kind of workplace that not only produces precision parts but also precision people—skilled, engaged, and committed to excellence. It’s the kind of workplace that can weather economic ups and downs, adapt to technological changes, and consistently deliver value to customers.

So, if you’re ready to start gearing up for a stronger future, with these Gears of Gratey in place, you’ll be cutting through challenges and polishing your success in no time. The future of manufacturing isn’t just about better machines—it’s about better cultures. And that future starts with you.

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Lisa Ryan is the Chief Appreciation Strategist and Founder of Gratey, where she specializes in workplace culture transformation through the strategic application of gratitude.

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