



When Free Costs Too Much

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The word free used to be a great way for a consultant and/or seminar instructor to get his foot in the door of a potential client. I personally have conducted many free introductory sessions at companies curious about using electronic sensors for mistake-proofing their manufacturing operations. Lately, I have run into enough of a deviation from this model to detect a possible trend away from technical training, even when given away. "Ignorance is Bliss," may be the new mantra at some companies. It has a perverse logic to it, of sorts. In the short term, there is no money for new thinking as we are just barely keeping our existing thoughts alive. However, in the long term, I believe that such planned ignorance can be catastrophic as tool designers and other skilled individuals remain blind to technologies that could minimize if not eliminate the costs of doing business.

I remember a great German tool and die maker and company owner with whom I had the privilege to have many conversations. His vision was clear. During both good and bad economic times his technical employees would not suffer declines in their education. This was equally so for new toolroom apprentices as it was for his advanced die design and build groups. To paraphrase his words, "We may not always have the money to invest in new ideas, but we, at the very least through ongoing education, will know, as soon as funds are available, where to invest in new technical thinking to improve our bottom line."

As the baby-boom generation retires, those who remain at their companies will not have the benefit of learning

how to maximize the existing technologies that those baby boomers implemented, much less the technologies that are being developed daily on the outside. If a next-generation designer or builder of tooling and dies is not exposed to the latest electronic sensors and controls, then he remains stuck in the past, struggling with the elimination of scrap and die repair, on through automated in-die part quality inspections, self-adjusting dies and in-die value-added functions.

Maintaining an educated workforce as it applies to electronic sensors is not an option in this highly competitive economic environment. Truly, I ask, what better time to eliminate die repairs and the costs of scrapped parts than in these miserable economic times?

For those who believe that keeping tooling and production personnel in the dark about new developments (or even older successful applications) of electronic sensors in your stamping and value-added operations is a sound way to postpone investments in technology, I urge a word of caution. That word is optimism. By exposing your technical staff to the innumerable ways that productivity can be enhanced with electronic sensors, you will instill in them a sense of optimism as they learn the proven techniques for mistake-proof manufacturing, even if the funds in the short term are not available to implement the new ways. Whether training is provided by independent consultants, vendors or PMA, sending your employees to seminars to crack open their technical imaginations is one of the surest ways to ensure your company's long-term success. **MF**

This CD-ROM presents dozens of George's columns as well as papers and exclusive new presentations covering all aspects of die protection and part-quality inspection, starting and maintaining sensor programs, the role of controls in in-die sensing, and the benefits of a sound sensor program. Order it online at www.metalformingmagazine.com.



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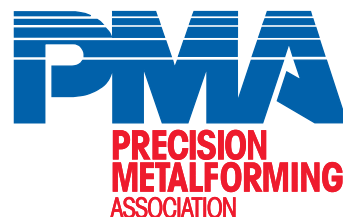
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