

2013: The Year of Soft Gains Big Ideas

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Oftentimes, December finds us landlocked here in Wisconsin. The snow starts to fall and, with each day closer to the holidays, the cost of flights inch up more and more. This year, I was lucky enough to sneak out for one last trip before any of these pesky details had a chance to inhibit my efforts.

This last trip of 2012 was Baldor motor company's "Publisher's Tour," an annual event where editors and publishers get a chance to convene with the Baldor team for the latest updates on new product technology and internal initiatives.

This year's event took dozens of industry veterans on a tour of three plants, as well as Baldor's quality test center. It was a jam-packed road trip across the rolling hills of North and South Carolina, where bus rides were interrupted with comprehension quizzes to make sure we were all listening (we were).

Baldor did an excellent job of communicating to us just how much effort they put into continuous improvement. Not one of these facilities was a one-trick pony, and we learned of initiatives centered around process improvement, facility design, collaboration, product design, maintenance, and quality — among others. What they wanted to remind us of was that they were not willing to leave any stone unturned when it came to unearthing ways to improve.

I think this is an important lesson, especially heading into a year that some notable analysts are suggesting may be lukewarm from a growth standpoint. The ISM Manufacturing Report on Business closed out 2012 with some uneven numbers, no surprise considering the fluctuations we'd seen in the second half of the year. MAPI's Daniel Meckstroth responded to the report with his own organization's take, suggesting that manufacturing may be contending with some very soft gains, concluding: "MAPI forecasts manufacturing industrial production will increase only 2

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percent in 2013."

So, if MAPI is right and manufacturing has a quiet year, I'd suggest you think about "pulling a Baldor." Examine everything within reach and think about how you can do it better. Some of the initiatives at Baldor based around safety, quality, production flow, and machinery investments resulted in big gains. Just as one example, Baldor's Shelby, NC, DC motor plant, which started producing in June of 2012, has the flexibility to produce any specified electrical design for DMI motors. This is due to its tooling capabilities (32 dies for rotor notching and an automated commutator slotter), along with extensive training programs designed to create consistent, quality work from its employees.

Some of this requires painstaking, hands-on winding of wiring — something we got to see with our own eyes as we walked the aisles of a plant floor that was enviable in its layout, equipment, and personnel. But Baldor has high hopes for the results of these efforts, and has already stated that this facility will serve as the global center of excellence for DC motor production.

Obviously, success to Baldor is more than just standing by, waiting for orders to come in. They, along with parent company ABB, have made a statement with their investments — one that says, we're not letting the economy alone dictate our success or failure.

Baldor was good inspiration for me, besides. And we'll continue to do our best to provide you with as many inspiring stories as we can this year. In fact, never landlocked for long, I write this from my hotel room in Minden, NV on the site of my next plant tour. That being said, if your customers aren't going to put much more money in your pockets, it's up to you to find ways to make 2013 a great year. We know you can do it.

What's your take? Please feel free to comment below or email anna.wells@advantagemedia.com [1].

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