



THE ASSOCIATION & VOICE OF THE US SEWN PRODUCTS INDUSTRY

MILLENNIAL CORNER:

Generational rivalries, stereotypes have no place in the textile industry

Editor's note: Here is our latest installment of our Millennial Corner feature. This blog gives the younger generation – who in the near future will serve in leadership positions and guide the direction of the association – a larger voice and platform NOW and will help them engage more the entire SEAMS' membership while busting stereotypes.

**By Anthony Marini
Heartland Manufacturing**

Hello, SEAMS! This is Anthony Marini of Heartland Manufacturing, writing to all of you from our factory here in Long Island.

It sure is turning out to be one heck of decade so far. I entered the industry in 2012 when we were strictly a sweater manufacturer. I had never even heard of the term “PPE,” so the idea that eight years later, I would be reciting Levels I, II and III isolation gown requirements from AANSI: PB-70, building relationships with SMS fabric producers or sewing millions of cloth face masks out of fabric that was originally destined to become underwear was a far stretch, to say the least. And yet, here we are, in a new decade and more importantly, what seems to be a revitalized industry.

We've seen so many new firms open shop in the past two years, ranging from strictly design and R&D to mass scale production. It's been nice to see that the “Made In USA” movement has gone from a sentimental marketing campaign to a full-scale national security concern. And all it took was worldwide pandemic. Who'd thought?!

The point is, I'm very excited to see that more and more retailers and businesses making an aggressive push to establish and even re-establish their domestic manufacturing footprints. From my view, this is much-needed encouragement to entice more young people to consider a career in textiles – the American kind.

We were fortunate enough to exhibit at Texprocess Americas in Atlanta last month. This was the first show we ever exhibited at, so it was an exciting experience to meet many new faces in the industry and see familiar faces that have known us for years. As I spoke with manufacturers there, one theme emerged – our workforce is aging and retiring.

From what I understand, this segment is supposed to highlight the views from the younger generation in the context of the textile industry. So, let's start there.



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First off, in my view, the generational rivalry that is all too persistent in mainstream culture has no place in the textile industry. As a Millennial, I do not believe I work any more or any less hard or smart than the two generations preceding me or the new kids in the block succeeding me. From this knitter's perspective, a Half-Cardigan stitch has been knit the same way long before I showed up on the scene, and it will continue to be knit the same way long after I move on from this earth.

The Boomers aren't knitting it any better than the Gen X'ers, who aren't knitting it any better than we Millennials, who aren't knitting it any better than Gen Z. Trust me, none of us in the manufacturing space are saying, "Dang, I wish we had a good ol' Boomer to run these machines right now!" Instead, we're saying, "Dang, I wish we had ANYONE to run these machines right now!"

From a technical standpoint, there isn't a difference in the way this industry is perceived by different generations. Any new technology that is introduced will eventually be adopted by all of us so long as it proves it can increase our productivity and efficiency. This can range from new PLM and ERP software, manufacturing equipment, to even ancillary services such as ZOOM and Microsoft Teams.

The younger crowd may adopt these things earlier, but all will eventually learn, use, and in some cases enjoy these new tools given enough time. I think this knocks down the stereotypical barriers that may keep different generations from taking each other seriously, i.e. Boomers don't know how to use the internet, Millennials are soft self-centered snowflakes, etc.

In the context of the textile industry, from my experience, the older crowd gets just as excited about technological progress in our space, and the younger crowd is more than happy to absorb as much knowledge as we can from these seasoned industry vets.

I don't have a formal education in textiles, so all my industry knowledge was obtained on the job. The first five years of my career on the knitting floor were spent running, maintaining and repairing machines. My mentors were thorough with my training, forcing me to learn every aspect of the equipment we ran, right down to the fuses that powered the circuit boards that controlled our machines.

Speaking of those mentors, I had three of them during those five years ... all in their 50s at the time. They were great teachers, and I benefited greatly from each of their 30+ years of experience in the trade. I wasn't treated with any resentment or skepticism because we were from different generations. Yes, we viewed society through different lenses, but our views on the job were ubiquitous; just get the darn thing done right. When it comes to this industry, I see the sentiment remaining ubiquitous for as long as it exists in this country.



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Millennials aren't the young brats that we are still depicted as in society anymore. I'm considered a younger Millennial and I'm 30. Trust me, I've already lost touch with the new pop culture trends and jokes that I was once effortlessly up to date on by pure social osmosis. The

first of the next generation is already entering the workforce, and we need to make sure we do our part to welcome them into the fold with enthusiasm and support.

What music, shows or activities that engage us is irrelevant to the underlying issue at hand. Our workforce is aging, and all our skills and knowledge along with it. Generations will come and go, but industries and trades will carry on. As current and future veterans, we have a responsibility to this community to ensure that it can continue to thrive and remain relevant for as long as possible.