

David Butwid

TITLE: Vice president of sales and marketing, Gorbel; Vice chair of EASE, the Ergonomic Assist Systems & Equipment industry group at MHI

LOCATION: Fishers, N.Y.

EXPERIENCE: 35 years at Gorbel

PRIMARY FOCUS: Responsible for sales, marketing and customer service at Gorbel. The EASE industry group provides a forum for current ergonomic, safety and health issues and trends affecting the performance and safety of human work.

Modern: David, you've been in the industry for 35 years. If you think of how the industry has evolved, what would you say is the state of ergonomics today?

Butwid: When you're talking about ergonomics, what you're really talking about is the creation of user-friendly systems or processes that consider the interaction between the human and the machine, while increasing safety and productivity. On the industrial side of the industry, we are focused on improving safety and productivity. If I look back at when I joined Gorbel, we have been talking about ergonomics since the mid-1980s, but it didn't come to the fore until the mid-1990s. Today, just about every major company we talk to—and I'm sure this is true for other members of EASE—has an ergonomist on staff. That is something we didn't see even in the 1990s.

Modern: What is the role of the ergonomist in the organization?

Butwid: The ergonomists primary role is to help engineers designing systems and the workers performing a task pick out the right equipment for the job. To be frank, there's a lot of equipment on the market that may be ergonomic, but hasn't been applied properly by



currently working with the College Industry Council on Material Handling Education (CICMHE) to develop a university curriculum for teaching ergonomics. This will complement the courses universities have always taught about the concept of ergonomics by providing appropriate content for specific applications, like pick-and-place applications. That's something we hope to have finalized in the next year and ready for the classroom in the fall of 2016.

engineers or isn't used by workers. And, let's face it: If a worker isn't willing to use it, ultimately it's a bad solution. So, the role of the ergonomist is to interact with engineers and workers to develop a process or system that is safe, productive and, most importantly, will be used. That's a big and important shift.

Modern: We have often heard that there is more of an emphasis on ergonomics in Europe than in the United States. Is that the case, and if so, how does it differ?

Butwid: The difference is that in Europe, there are standards that companies have to meet. In the United States, there are no standards. States like North Carolina and California have guidelines, and we are seeing a trend among some large companies to develop their own guidelines for their engineers and workers. But, you don't have to comply with a guideline. The lack of a standard is a barrier to raising ergonomic awareness.

Modern: That's a good segue to talk about what you're doing at EASE.

Butwid: Raising ergonomic awareness is one of the most important things we do at EASE. For instance, we're

Modern: How about building awareness within industry?

Butwid: We are working with the Ergonomics Center of North Carolina to develop a two-hour training package that will help EASE members, manufacturers of ergonomics equipment and dealers to train their sales forces to be better ergonomics consultants with customers. For instance, ergonomics and lean manufacturing should go hand in hand. You want to perform a task as efficiently and safely as possible in lean. So, we'll be training them to go into a work cell and identify ways to make it as efficient and ergonomic as possible.

Modern: Companies understand that ergonomics is important. Now, it's getting them to apply the concepts in their operations?

Butwid: You're right. In the 1990s, companies were just beginning to understand the importance of ergonomics. Now, they're hiring ergonomists. That's a lot of progress in 20 years. The next step is to work on the proper application of the equipment. That's what we're developing with CICMHE and with training materials for people in the field. □