



OWNER/PRESIDENT OF MRG TOOL AND DIE

MEET **MICHAEL GRAMSE**, FSHS CLASS OF 1966, ENTREPRENEUR, BUSINESS OWNER, AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION ADVOCATE.

Michael Gramse

A visitor's first impression of Michael Gramse's company, MRG Tool and Die, is formed by words printed in bold letters on a wall facing a vast factory floor: "INTEGRITY – Show it. Live it. Feel it. COLLABORATION – Together we are successful. INNOVATION – We create solutions." These are his company's core values, and they describe all one needs to know about Michael Gramse.

According to Mary Utpadel, Office Manager/Customer Service employee for 32 years, Michael Gramse lives his values. When asked by a *Minnesota Business Magazine* interviewer to cite his strongest characteristic, Gramse answered, "I think being honest, being straightforward, not trying to whitewash things." Utpadel agrees: "He definitely believes in honesty and forthrightness in his relationships with employees and customers. His integrity is a major reason employees and customers are devoted to the company."

Gramse realized his talent for working with machines when he enrolled in a machine shop class as a junior at Faribault Senior High. During his senior year, he enrolled in a three-hour vocational machine course taught by Forest Knoss. After graduation, he attended the Faribault Area Vocational and Technical Institute where he completed the Tool and Die program in 1968 under the tutelage of Page Lawson.

He returned to Faribault after a stint in the Navy, newly married to Eva Froman, and began working for companies where he learned to build progressive dies and special machines. He left Master Tool, an Eagan company, several years later and formed Duo Tool and Die in 1979 with a partner he met at the company. After a friendly separation, Gramse kept the shop, its two employees, and renamed the company MRG Tool and Die. Over the years, MRG has grown to include 73 employees, a 66,000 square foot facility, and a diverse customer base, including nearly all Faribault's industries.

MRG Tool and Die enjoys a reputation among domestic and international corporations for its outstanding, high-quality workmanship, on-time delivery, and customer service. Gramse states that he is reminded of his company's reputation when "a customer of ours retires – usually it's an engineer we have been working with for a long time – then tells us we have been their best supplier. Several times over the years, we have had the honor of being told we are the best shop they work with, and that makes me feel we have been successful."

Gramse takes pride in hiring local people, many of whom have been with his company for decades. Employees are loyal to the company because, as Utpadel says, "We are treated like family." Employees also feel appreciated. Machinist, Thad Sundahl, explains, "We work in teams. We're encouraged to be collaborative and to learn from one another. Our projects are interesting, challenging, and require us to be problem-solvers and innovators."

Gramse is a tenacious advocate for vocational education - especially manufacturing - having served as chairman of South Central College Foundation Board, as well as being a significant scholarship donor. He is a recipient of the SCC Outstanding Alumni Award (2015), Manufacturing Life Time Achievement Award (2015), and Small Manufacturer of the Year (2012). His civic activities include Peace Lutheran Church president, Faribault Rotary president, supporter of Basic Blessings Backpack Program, and a member of the Faribault Chamber of Commerce and Faribault Industrial Corporation. He is particularly devoted to philanthropy supporting children and families.

Michael Gramse's legacy continues through his children. His oldest son, Rod, has been promoted to company president. He expresses a desire to continue the family's value-centered approach to running a thriving business and caring for people begun by his father.