

Wise head guides young Apprentices to success at KMF (Precision Sheet Metal) Limited

NEED: Finding young people with relevant academic qualifications

SOLUTION: An Apprenticeship programme and Apprentice Mentor

NEED When Newcastle-under-Lyme based KMF analysed the age profile across their workforce, it discovered an issue that many organisations will identify with. That the skills and knowledge needed to maintain its competitive market position were largely confined to an ageing workforce. Conversely, finding young people with the relevant academic qualifications and attitude proved a difficult task.

SOLUTION With a requirement for high-end specialist skills, KMF felt that the most effective solution for the business was an Apprenticeship programme to allow them to develop their own skill base. However, as the programme evolved, they recognised that the young recruits were struggling to get to grips with the technical skills requirements alongside the pace of technological changes and the academic component of the programme.

Rather than let them struggle along unaided, KMF put a support mechanism in place and the exemplary results it has achieved, attest the sound judgement of this approach. The key to this success was supplementing the programme with an experienced, in-house mentor. John Booth was appointed as Apprentice Mentor and he had a vital role in developing the company's in-house training school. John was an obvious choice for the role as a retired engineer and college lecturer with many years experience in the industry.

"We wanted to ensure the future of the business was not affected by lack of relevant, up-to-date skills or lack of development of our workforce" said Managing Director, Mick Higgins. "It was particularly important to address the age profile across the workforce by bringing in and developing new, young talent to compliment the skills we already had".

PROGRAMME KMF view the recruitment of apprentices as a 'partnership between the apprentices, their parents and the company'. It handles the entire process itself including advertising, recruitment and interviewing to show young people the opportunities available and creating links with local schools who are invited to organised tours of the factory.

Each year, four apprentices are appointed across various disciplines including Maintenance, Fabrication and Electrical Assembly. From day one, they have the support and guidance of the Apprentice Mentor to help them. John explained "By being there to listen, help and support we can overcome any hurdles the Apprentice is facing. It may be that they find the academic aspect of the programme challenging or they need some extra help with a particular technical element. Whatever it is, I can work with them to address it".

SUCSESSES After running its first programme, KMF's approach was substantiated when Peter Krynicki won the prestigious Metal Industry Apprentice of the Year competition the year after completing his Advanced Apprenticeship which he collected at a glittering Awards ceremony held in Cutlers Hall, Sheffield. This established award is presented by Metskill, an employer-led organisation dedicated to improving skills and performance in the metals industry, and now a division of Sector Skills Council Semta.

Terry Stanway, KMF's Purchasing Manager who is responsible for maintaining the company's high quality standards in apprentice recruitment, explained that "It gives us an excellent opportunity to promote within the company and utilise the skills and ability the Apprentices bring as they complete their training".



John Booth and Peter Krynicki

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CASE STUDY

BUSINESS BENEFITS

- Continuity of high-end skills in the business to maintain market competitiveness.
- Enhanced learning and improved, more enjoyable experience for new, young apprentices.
- Attracting young people from the local community to the business.



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