

Where Have all the Apprentices Gone?



I have never thought of myself as a dinosaur before, the last valiant defender going down fighting. However, as a recent guest at the Vibration Association (VANZ) annual conference, a series of speaking points and conversations left me wondering what is becoming of the trades world.

MESNZ have no illusions about the situation with apprentice training in New Zealand. The quality and direction of apprentice training has steadily devolved from the heydays of the 1960's when New Zealand churned out world beating tradesmen. MESNZ observes and, where possible, gets involved in initiatives to improve the apprenticeship system. Regardless of changes in the economic and industrial scene however, no amount of spin doctoring will convince old tradesmen that the current scheme is a touch on what we had.

The surprise in store for me at the VANZ conference was the feedback from the North American guests. Even in the great industrialised US of A, apprentices and training is under the same immense pressure. Teach more in less time. Train faster. Downsize the skill base. If the same thing is happening there, what chance do we have?

I can understand the impact of commercial and modern pressures on the apprentice concept. I can even understand the evolution and changing technical requirements by industry. I do wonder though where the industrial world thinks it is going to maintain, evolve and develop its skill base.

For one horrible moment there, I looked around the room full of my peers and thought, "Are we a dying breed?"

After a lie down and some reflection, I gathered my resolve and realised that, it is vital that industry and interest groups understand their collective responsibility and take a proactive stand to ensure sensible evolution of our skill base. In New Zealand in particular there is a huge amount of pressure on our manufacturing capability. If we don't want to become a nation of tourism operators, retailers or seamstresses, retaining technical expertise is something we need to get better at, not worse. Our recent history in the last 40 years is dotted with a mismatch of skills and industry needs. I congratulate those kiwi companies who do invest in apprentices and understand where the pay back really lies. MESNZ also understands its role in championing the sensible governance of apprentices and actively pursues a course of involvement through committee membership and inter-governance involvement.

Talking about furthering the capability and experience of maintenance engineers, registrations are now out for the **2010 National Maintenance Engineering Conference** to be held in New Plymouth in November. If you or your engineers need to be finding solutions to problems relating to any aspect of maintenance management, get them there! The decision to hold the national conference in Taranaki is a great opportunity for the local industry to get involved as well as a once in a lifetime opportunity for out-of-towners to get close to some of the oil and gas industry action. Early bird opportunities exist for sponsors, attendees and exhibitors on top of what is easily the cheapest 2 day conference in the industry so be quick to secure your place. Details can be found on the MESNZ website, www.mesnz.org.nz/nmec/ or by calling Leanne on (09) 296 1333

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