



Dr. Die Cast



Where Have All the Journeymen Gone?

(What happened to our apprenticeship/training programs?)

Imagine building a new plant miles from your nearest competitor in an area of unskilled labor. Now that all the machines are installed, tools built and the facility is ready to go, you receive your first orders. Somehow, your customers didn't get the memo that you needed a year to train your staff and get everything worked out. They released orders for every part number in the plant. All of a sudden all your parts are past due or due next week. How can you fill all these orders with a plant full of inexperienced people?

In recent months, I have observed a sharp increase in business in the die casting industry. That is good news and bad news for the industry. Certainly most companies are happy with the increased sales. However, with the changes in the market, many of the machine operators are new and inexperienced (translate: un-trained). Some have observed that the experienced operators are not returning to the die casting industry or are otherwise not available. The result of this has been a gap in processing discipline and knowledge that resembles a new plant start-up. It is

clear that companies are responding with Herculean effort to fill the orders. Many companies are running 24/7. They are adding shifts, recruiting workers by every means available. At a recent conference, an Operations Mgr. commented that whether he ran an ad for "Full-Time" employees or "Temporary Workers," the same people showed up to apply.

With all due respect to recruiters, the long term solution is not to steal technical help from our competitors. We need to train the people we already have. To borrow from the situation mentioned above, we need to train the people that "showed up." Most people can be trained for our industry. And they are grateful for the opportunity and for the job. People will rise to the occasion when asked to

"I can't afford to train"
really? According to author Derek Bok, "If you think education is expensive, try (the price of) ignorance." Most mistakes are from either inadequate or incorrect training.

How much time does it take? None of us have an unlimited budget. You have to prioritize based

on current problems. A Pareto chart of down time and scrap is a useful tool to help define the most common problems. Sometimes, in order to emphasize the importance of a certain topic you need to do something dramatic. Once when my plant was experiencing chronic problems during each start-up, I called 2nd shift in 1 hour early and we stopped all production for one hour so I could train both first and second shifts on the proper techniques for die start up. It was radical but everyone knew it was important and they learned the information quickly. It was immediately effective. You might ask, "Was it worth it?" Coupled with other improvements, we were able to eliminate Saturday work in a matter of weeks while at the same time we were increasing sales.

What would eliminating 1 overtime day be worth in your plant?

Your problems are probably not that serious, but I wager that even the best plants can benefit from additional training and a fresh perspective.



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