

Dr. Die Cast



Re-thinking Die Casting Employee Training and Education

If the COVID-19 pandemic has accomplished anything, it serves as a reminder that we are never finished training. Following are just a few examples of why training is never complete:

1. Senior employees who were either approaching or working past retirement age retired with little or no notice.
2. Our training plan was focused on hand picked successors for senior key employees.
3. Lost production due to extended employee illnesses and quarantines due to exposure.
4. The succession plan didn't exactly work as planned.
 - Our hand-picked successors were either quarantined due to exposure (their own or a family member) or contracted the virus and were out recuperating.
 - Whole departments were absent at the same time due to illness or quarantine.
 - People decided to stay home out of fear.
 - Some decided to retire sooner than previously planned and never returned.

So, who and when do we train for specialized and technical positions? Everyone, because we can't know which person that we are dependent on today will suddenly be absent or leave permanently.

I've also observed that often, there are people who are carrying responsibilities far exceeding their job description. Examples would be "machine operators" who are also doing machine troubleshooting and process troubleshooting, set-ups, machine repair and maintenance, die repair and maintenance, ordering spare parts, etc., all in addition to their basic duties and responsibilities listed in an H.R. job description. It is not until they are absent for a period of time that it becomes apparent who was keeping the plant moving.

How do we accelerate "Tribal knowledge"?

Not all skilled people are good communicators, especially when it comes to training techniques they learned through experience. We see this often in the die casting industry where the terminology was developed in-house or from a particular supplier who may be translating information from another language. For example, I've learned there are at least 5 names for cold chambers. Asking someone to increase the fast shot speed will result in the operator adjusting any number of different valves, some which have little or nothing to do with fast shot velocity. Anyone who has purchased imported equipment has experienced first-

hand the frustration of reading an owners-manual that was translated by someone unfamiliar with the equipment or process.

Language and terminology are crucial. As mentioned above in the cold chamber example, when people use different terms for the same components, efficiencies suffer. The tool room, maintenance and operations all need to learn and use the same terms. Therefore, training needs to be cross-functional. Don't leave out die or machine repair departments when you have a "Gate Design" or "Process Control" class. It will reduce a lot of down time and mistakes by having clear communication between departments.

Who's Dr. Die Cast?

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