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Leif – Where Do New Trades Come From?

Do you know what an Electro Mechanical Technician does? How about a Data Scientist or a Flexographic Print Operator? Did you know that a Flexographic Print Operator can work with a narrow or wide print substrate? I have been working in apprenticeship for the last three years and I am continually amazed at how a well-seasoned worker shares their knowledge and experience in such a way that an apprentice is able to develop a skill to take on the role of a fully trained journey worker.

The process of creating trade outlines is facilitated by the New York State Department of Labor, specifically by Leif Sagaas, who is located in the Albany office. He creates the Appendix A – On the Job Learning (OJL) process requirements as well as the Appendix B – related technical instruction requirements.

For those of us who have seen these documents, you understand that the OJL requirements are basically the expansion of the skills requirements for a particular job, expanded into specific skills and the approximate number of hours necessary to become fully proficient in that skill. This sounds a lot easier than it is.

Meet the investigation process and the job study. A job study is the specific tool that Leif uses to create these outlines. Not so difficult if you are a CNC Machinist creating a CNC Machinist outline – you know the job, you know the environment. But how does a man with a bachelor's degree in Social Studies and a Journey Worker Card from the Floor Layers Union do it?

A new trade outline starts with the investigation process. Does this new trade exist anywhere else in the United States? Very frequently we find similar trades, but often

the beginning is another trade that is active or inactive in New York combined with other similar trades and a lot of red ink. Usually on the part of the employer first. We also seek input from operations personnel, journey workers who currently work in the trade, HR and Training managers, and anyone else who can contribute to the conversation. Leif will guide the company to scratch out things that don't belong, add the critical skills and processes, and then discuss categorizing processes and determining how many hours are necessary to train to competency.

Next comes the job study. The job study starts with a tour of the facility and a lot of questions. Who is responsible for which tasks? What is the function of this machine? Where are the critical tools for this job located? Why is the work area set up this way? When do you know that someone is ready to do this job on their own? The next part of the study is really getting into the minutiae of the job. Step one, step two, materials, machinery, inspection, maintenance, etc. This comes from watching the job being done over an extended part of the workday along with watching how the skilled worker monitors their jobs and how they interact with other parts of the job such as inventory or quality.

Leif's final steps include going back and summarizing notes to broaden his understanding of the new trade and ultimately creating a Draft Training Outline to deliver to the company. More back and forth and a final draft is created. The draft is posted on the DOL website for 30 days for comments. If no objections are noted, it goes on to the Apprenticeship Training Council meeting for final approval.

This activity is one of my favorite parts of my job. It is really rewarding to see the whole process through from beginning to end.