

Soft Skills – The New Skills Shortage?



Arguably the biggest hurdle facing manufacturing today is the shortage of skilled workers. With fewer high schools offering hands-on learning through vocational classes, young workers interested in pursuing a career in manufacturing are tasked with figuring out how to start a career in that industry. One facet of the hiring process many undermine, however is the importance of soft skills, including effective communication, resume writing and interviewing.

As part of AJAC's and Workforce Snohomish's 10-week pre-apprenticeship training program, the [Manufacturing Academy](#), students are given the opportunity during each cohort to tour a handful of local-area manufacturing companies, to fully understand the soft and technical skills needed to become a productive employee. In May, a dozen students from the Monroe Manufacturing Academy were given the privilege to tour [SEA-LECT Plastics](#), an Everett-based manufacturer specializing in plastic injection molding – particularly for outdoor recreational equipment. SEA-LECT Plastics is a registered Training Agent with apprentices enrolled in AJAC's [Tool & Die Maker](#) and [Industrial Maintenance Mechanic](#) apprenticeship programs.

SEA-LECT Plastics' Vice President and General Manager, [Matt Poischbeg](#), provided an in-depth tour of his facility, starting out in the Tool and Die area. Matt spoke on the various tolerances and molds required to create parts for equipment such as RVs, kayaks and boats. Across the room, two desktop computers laid side-by-side with design models created by the Tool & Die Makers. Matt explained the importance of creating and designing every part correctly, the first time. In an industry that encompasses clients across the globe, designing and manufacturing each part is critical to SEA-LECT's global business model.



The students migrated to the machining area, where Matt discussed various job titles, machine operation procedures and job requirements for each position. Amidst the large machines was one of AJAC's apprentices, Ryan Ross. Matt, a former apprentice who studied in Germany, fully understands the importance of structured on-the-job training within manufacturing companies, "I love the Manufacturing Academy concept to begin with. Giving a tour of SEALECT-Plastics was a great opportunity for me to meet the students and tell them about the benefits of skill training, apprenticeships and OJT, as well as getting them interested in manufacturing, specifically Plastic

Injection Molding,” Matt said. “Many people are discouraged when they think about current job opportunities because all they hear is that a four year college degree is the golden ticket. In Germany for example, apprenticeships are the backbone of the middle class.”



As the tour came to a close, students circled around Matt while he discussed the importance of soft skills. When asked what the number one skill everyone at SEA-LECT Plastics has, he replied, “being on-time and giving 100%. Everything else will fall in to place.” Matt is the type of supervisor who looks for employees he can mold (no pun intended). A positive attitude can go a long way in his company. All of his employees fit the work environment he has envisioned – team players who are easy to work with. One of the Manufacturing Academy students, Jason Craig, saw several benefits to pursue a career in manufacturing, “It gave me a more in-depth look at the aspect of manufacturing and the environment,” he said. “Having never truly seen manufacturing up close, it was enlightening.”

Matt emphasized that in an industry where priorities constantly change, employees must be flexible, yet productive and content with their day-to-day tasks. Matt had a few words of advice for the students, “Find an apprenticeship program. Every manufacture in the country is hiring skilled workers right now. Unfortunately not very many businesses offer apprenticeships at the moment, but with the collaboration of AJAC, businesses can be signed up without a hassle.”