

Workforce Development

Helping You To Meet Your Workforce Challenges

Training the Next Generation: Training Through German Eyes: Not What You Expect

By Sterling Gill, III – New Workforce Development Manager

How do we grow? How can we compete? How do we identify our needs? On my recent visit to PMPA technical member HORN USA's parent company in Germany, Paul HORN GmbH, I learned that its growth was born out of its need to compete. HORN began in 1969 as a small specialty tool company in an industry already filled with established giants. To compete, the company realized it must develop its people. In order to grow, talent must be developed. Today, HORN has over 1,400 employees in multiple production and sales locations worldwide. The company's experience shows that growth is possible when we grow our people to help all of us better face the challenges that occur.

How do we develop talent? One way is to define what we are looking for in the people we hire. At HORN, we were surprised to find that this was not its sole focus. The candidate has to meet the requirements for the job, but not all of those requirements were strictly job-task-competency related. At HORN, we learned that a great deal of attention is given to creating each class of apprentices in order to create a solid team. The approach is to build a team first. How well an individual fits in a team environment is every bit as important as the other vocational abilities they bring. Companies can't grow if the culture isn't right. This is why HORN pays strict attention to assure the people that they understand the importance of, and are capable of, working with others. Their focus is on using the strengths of each person for the benefit of the whole.

At HORN, I recognized that I was perhaps distracted by focusing on the individual strengths and weaknesses without understanding that weaknesses can be overcome by the strength of a team. This is truly positioning people for success. Seldom do our people have to solve problems strictly on their

own. When a major issue occurs in our shops, it is standard practice to apply team-oriented problem-solving techniques. We recognize that all of us are smarter than some of us, and that we get the best results when everyone can contribute according to their strengths. This is critical to problem solving and empowering a positive culture within a company's infrastructure.



HORN's training program focuses on putting people in positions for success. In part, this is accomplished by selecting people that bring solid potential to the team. Looking at each individual's strengths and weaknesses and then placing them where they can help others learn as well as pick up what they need to become more proficient. This means that the learning process is a team process. The company training experience simulates and models real work experience, including working as part of a team.

The apprenticeship training program is not only about teamwork, but it includes a good portion of it. The training program at HORN focuses on developing each person while part of a team. Strong technical competencies, knowledge and skills are developed in each apprentice as they master new challenges. Collaboration, cooperation, communication and problem solving help bring each individual to their highest level of developed skill. Their training is directly applicable to the work being done on the production floor.

Apprentices work hand in hand with current employees, trainers, and each other, as a team. The HORN philosophy is reinforced by how the company approaches recruiting and developing young talent. It is important to learn and develop machining techniques, but it starts with understanding the importance of teamwork.

The training program was extensive in the technical and competency-based lessons that it provides over the course of the apprentices' term. My point is not to diminish the value of that part of the program.

But I must say I had not expected to learn that the ability to work well with others as part of a team was even on the specification for potential apprentices. After learning how the apprentices work with mentors, go out to production jobs from time to time, and work on major group projects—not just machining exercises—I saw the need for the emphasis on team skills. Emphasis on the team, work experience and continuous improvement contributed to the overall growth and success of the company's training program.

As I reflect upon what I have learned from this visit, it comes down to the importance of valuing teamwork and content. Before my visit, my sole focus was on the talent of individuals and how their potential for performance can be measured. I learned at HORN that teamwork and the ability to face challenges as part of a team is every bit as important as those other individual traits we all know are so important. The company's emphasis on teamwork, communications and problem solving in their potential apprentices was an unexpected revelation to me. My visit to HORN showed me that teamwork, communications and problem solving are essential.