

Published by
The Society of Operations Engineers
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The Society of Operations Engineers is a licensed member of the Engineering Council.

Registered in England
Company No 3667147

Registered Charity
No 1081753
A Company Limited by Guarantee

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Transport Engineer
is the official journal of the IRTE,
a professional sector of the SOE.
Produced on behalf of the IRTE by
MA Business
Hawley Mill, Hawley Road,
Dartford, Kent DA2 7TJ
Tel: 01322 221144
www.transportengineer.org.uk

Transport Engineer
is distributed free of charge to SOE members,
dependent on membership sector. For
non-members, the annual subscription rate
(12 issues) is £79.50 UK and EU, or £81.50
airmail outside EU. For other SOE members,
the discounted rate is £32.

Printed by
Pensord Press UK

ISSN
0020-3122



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Looking to tomorrow

When I started in the motor vehicle industry in 1984 as an apprentice, it was the start of the decline of apprentice programmes. Year by year, vehicle operators and repair agents stopped their recruitment, leading to a reduction in training. Now, trained engineers in the twilight of their careers are looking to retiring without the next generation to follow behind. As a result, companies are now returning to apprenticeships.

I believe that apprenticeships are the most appropriate way to bring young people into the world of engineering by nurturing 'home grown' talent. That's how it all started for me as a 16-year-old, learning my trade from experienced technicians and dealing with established drivers who had been in the industry for 30 to 40 years. These people passed on vital skills and expertise, as well as the culture of the organisation. Having a diverse and profiled age demographics provided the best mix of youth, mid-career and experienced engineers, all learning from each other.

I started my apprenticeship in general haulage with Canning Transport before moving to what was then the Milk Marketing Board to finish my training. I had an excellent apprenticeship which covered a wide range of engineering disciplines included stripping and rebuilding engines, gearboxes and differentials, as well as undertaking electrical work, welding and fabrication. The team was a self-sufficient unit capable of undertaking a wide range of fleet engineering whilst outsourcing only very specialist work. Over the years, that mentality did change.

I am now returning to my roots, making my workplace self-sufficient and creating a team of multiskilled technicians and recruiting apprentices to maintain our fleet to the highest standards. I need my team to have a wide range of abilities so they can undertake any task they face. I'm applying the 90:10 rule: fix 90% of the work that comes in through the door using my in-house team and utilise more specialist or third-party expert support for the last 10%. Addressing the skills gaps and training needs is crucial.



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