

Y-12's Training and Technology: TAT and Tony O'Dell

Another person who wrote me about their experience at Training and Technology (TAT) was Tony O'Dell. Tony was one of the Oak Ridge High School students who went immediately to TAT. Here is his story:

"Training and Technology is where it all began for me as a youngster just out of high school. I was seventeen years old when I started. The class convening date was in May 1974, but that was too early for Oak Ridge High seniors who wanted to attend and stay on track for graduation.

"So, Oak Ridge school administrators struck a deal with several teachers who agreed to deliver our lessons at Y-12. So, every day for the last month of High School, one or two teachers met with High School seniors at Y-12's Building 9709 to provide lessons, tests, and to help with graduating requirements. We even received high school credit for a mathematics course taught by the Y-12 employees.

"I enrolled in machining and was trained on all aspects of machining - today I talk about this experience with machinists, and few have ever chased a thread by hand. Today, everything is computer driven. I feel honored to be amongst the machinists of long ago when everything was manually operated.

"You had to hand-grind your own cutting tools and operate the machines very carefully to precision levels equal to automated equipment today. This was always something that gave you great sense of accomplishment at the end of the day.

"I graduated from TAT in November 1974 and then I went on to accept a job at a machine shop in southern Alabama. I will forever be grateful to Y-12 for this opportunity which enabled me to find high paying work at a time when the US economy was in recession.

"TAT provided me with means to move on in life when I had few other options or opportunities. It enabled me to save and start college a short time later.

"Afterwards I joined the US Navy where I earned my pilot wings as a Naval aviator, and on later to a successful career at Y-12 as a finance officer and eventually earning an MBA while working. I made lifelong friendships with the TAT instructors who were world class in my opinion. Y-12 and TAT were huge success stories both from a business decision as well as a personal one for me."
— *Tony O'Dell*

Can't you just see the cooperation between the Oak Ridge High School and TAT? Not only did the high school teachers make personal accommodations to help their students graduate from high school, they even gave high school credit for math classes at TAT.

This unique experiment in East Tennessee to provide skills training to disadvantaged youth and others who were looking to learn a trade was highly successful. Much of that success can be attributed to the leaders and managers who had the foresight to push for new and innovative opportunities using tried and proven teaching methods to help young people who were often not given the opportunities to excel.

From Tony's brief story can be seen the gratefulness he feels today for the good start given him by attending TAT. That "feeling of a great sense of accomplishment at the end of the day" that he mentions is a key element in effective learning...something that may need to be reinforced in our current learning environment, huh?

I would say there are a number of aspects of TAT experiences that could well be replicated today and make significant improvements in skills training. The pride that comes from doing it yourself

and being successful at it is a basic principle that was obviously well understood by TAT and still holds true today.

Look for more stories from TAT as I continue to get calls and e-mails. Call me at 865-482-4224 or e-mail me at draysmith@comcast.net.