

Gary Bourk

2006 CO-OP and OYAP Employer Award Winner

This Ottawa Centre for Research and Innovation (OCRI) award recognizes the commitment from local employers who implement co-op and/or apprenticeship opportunities to high school students. It is part of OCRI's ongoing campaign to raise awareness about the important benefits that work experience provides both students and employers.

Gary Bourk, owner of Bourk's Complete Car Care, considers himself a lucky man working in a great industry. Now a third generation shop owner, he started young, sweeping the floors on Saturday mornings, going on to be an apprentice and then a technician. Taking ongoing training is second nature to him, with a twinkle he admits, "I'm still the one asking the fundamental questions". The secret to his obvious enjoyment centers on, "To be successful at anything, you've got to love what you're doing. You can't just work at something to make a living."

The Co-op Opportunity

Gary interviews potential co-op students the same way he interviews technicians he might hire. He wants to know what their interest in the industry is, why they want to work for his shop and what skills they bring.

Co-op teachers key to co-op work

Co-op teachers play a vital role in making co-op placements work. Gary trusts the co-op teacher's recommendations implicitly. He knows they know their students and will send him students with a genuine desire to work in the industry, students who are strong in both math and science. As a result, he can't remember the last time that a co-op placement was not successful. "Putting a student in

the wrong workplace setting is a turn-off for both the student and the employer". If a student doesn't take an interest in what he/she is doing within the first month of his or her placement, then the remaining four months of the five month placement will have no value either.

The ideal educational scenario

Over the years, Gary has seen co-op students' knowledge and skills improve by leaps and bounds, particularly in the area of computer usage. He feels student job-readiness could be improved, if the educational system placed greater emphasis on fundamental skills, such as the Math and Science behind the technology, and the English and analytical thinking skills that go into interpreting information from manuals. Gary would also like students to benefit from the same broad, eye-opening exposure to various trades that was available to him when he went to school – exposure to electrical work, machine shops, in addition to the automotive field, because "When we restrict kids from options, we do them a disservice".



Value for the customers

"We guarantee everything we do." Gary says proudly, "our customers rely on our judgment and our ability to deliver industry standard work or better. The reason Gary can vouch for this, is that any work done by an apprentice is inspected and signed off by a senior technician who's reputation and income level depend on the quality of the work. Flat rate payment for piece work, in Gary's opinion, creates pressure for apprentices to learn short cuts at the expense of quality.

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"I've had women working for me in this industry who are wonderful. We don't attract enough women which is unfortunate. We need to focus on this area and support their interests in the automotive field as women are very capable of doing the job. Ours is very much a high tech trade now and tools are such that anyone can handle the work that's required, size no longer matters. Women need to know this and understand that the automotive workplace has changed. Most automotive shops welcome them."

- Gary Bourk, Owner, Bourk's Complete Car Care



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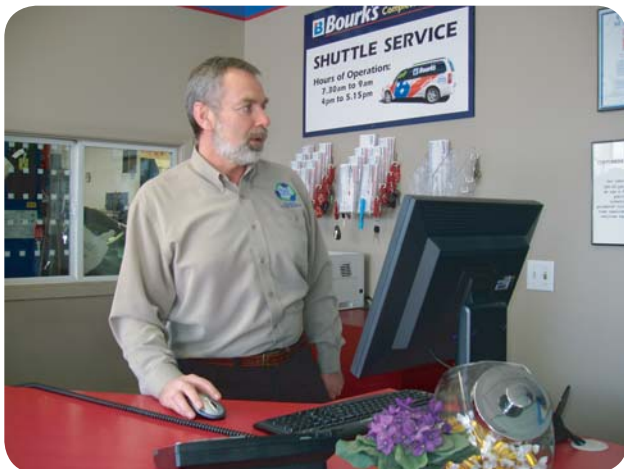
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How apprenticeship works at Bourk's

Because the cost of training is so high, Bourk's requires new apprentices to have 12 months of College level automotive training before being considered for a position. This gives a clear indication that the apprentice has made a personal commitment to developing a career in the trade, having invested time, energy and money.

Bring on the coach

Gary appreciates that not every technician is an ideal candidate to become a mentor to co-op students and apprentices because it is not just the technical skills that matter. Good trainers need tools and skill sets similar to those taught to prospective soccer coaches and Guide/Scout leaders. Gary is surprised that industry has not put formal processes in place to foster workplace mentors.

"If we turn off an apprentice, I lose my investment", says Gary. If on the other hand the apprentice is matched with a good mentor, then both the mentoring technician and the business benefit. "The technician is more productive with an extra pair of hands to help him and that means there is a financial incentive for him to do a good job of training."



Training to Grow and Diversify

Bourk's staff understand the need for training. "I don't have to push them. At least once a month they are in "school", taking the training they need to stay up to date." In Bourk's team-building environment, the process is technicians first take training in their areas of greatest expertise—air conditioning, electrical, etc. and then they can opt for additional training in other areas. The technician gets the training he's most interested in, the shop builds its overall capacity, and the customer gets a better job.

SKILLS IN DEMAND

Math and Science

allow you to understand the systems before you repair them.

English

gives you the ability to research service manuals on the Internet and read them for understanding of what is required.

Thinking Skills

With the proliferation of diagnostic systems in vehicles over the past 20 years, we really need people with analytical, strategy-based problem-solving skills to interpret the diagnostic information



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