

(Editorial prepared for the HVACR Insider Newspaper by Tom Hunt in the first decade of the 21st century. Exact date not known.)

APPRENTICESHIP

ap·pren·tice ə'prɛntɪs Show Spelled [uh-pren-tis] Show IPA *noun, verb, ap·pren·ticed, ap·pren·tic·ing.*

noun

1. a person who works for another in order to learn a trade: *an apprentice to a plumber.*
2. *History/Historical* . a person legally bound through indenture to a master craftsman in order to learn a trade.
3. a learner; novice; tyro.

I took this definition from online dictionary.com and will attempt in future issues to deal with each of the definitions of an apprentice. Before I do, let me say in this issue that I have been convinced for years that the best training in the world is hands on, getting dirty, sweating out the ignorance and instilling the skill. Books are great, theory is great, but there is no substitute for OJT. An instructor can lecture all day, can give and grade tests; but, until that instructor has the student break something and have to fix it, it is totally ineffectual. On the other hand, lots of techs know how to fix the day in, day out stuff but don't know why what they do fixes it. (I trust you followed that convoluted sentence. You get the drift.) It is when classroom theory is mated with OJT that real mechanics and techs are born. The gestation period is long and the delivery is difficult but the result is someone that can diagnose a "real head scratcher" and fix it—usually the first time. That, by the way, results in lower costs for the customer and higher profit margins for the contractor.

So where am I going with this? It is my opinion that we are spitting into a headwind with the Arkansas HVACR Licensing Law until we institute an apprenticeship program. No one likes regulation but we have plenty of it now and I would suggest that it is like spinning your wheels. Think on this:

- Tell me if our law assures the public of a well-trained technician.
- Tell me if our law assures the well-trained technician of a career path that will provide an above average wage, health insurance, vacation, and retirement.
- Tell me if our law levels the playing field for contractors trying to do the right thing by their customers while competing with folks that don't understand the difference between margin and mark-up.
- Tell me if we are seeing fewer non-licensed contractors.
- Tell me if our program is funded to provide a sense of job security for our inspectors or if they aren't sure from one year to the next if they will have a job.
- Tell me if training is consistent across the state and if there is a standard of excellence for those that spend their money and time taking HVACR classes at the technical colleges.

Well, in the next few issues, I will address these questions and tell you why I believe that a well-run apprenticeship program is the answer to all of them. Don't dismiss it just because you have seen some of the electrical or plumbing programs have difficulty with local classes and instructors. There is a solution to that but it will take guts and a willingness to support the

consumer rather than one particular program. Hang on, I intend to talk straight if it makes every last director of the status-quo upset.