

CareerBoat Corner: Apprenticeships

Notwithstanding the economy, the two biggest challenges for the recreational marine industry are:

- 1.) the disappearance of our working waterfront (typically to residential development) and
- 2.) the inability to replace our rapidly retiring trades workforce.

The baby boomer generation (76 million Americans) are slated to begin leaving the workforce next year and will do so over the next 20 years. The oldest baby boomer is 64, the youngest is 46. Many of these boomers are trades professionals, and will take with them an incredible amount of knowledge, skill and experience when they retire. Are you prepared? How will you fill the pipeline with a younger workforce? One answer might be apprenticeships, the centuries old practice of training a new generation of practitioners of a skill.

So, how does a yard begin down the apprenticeship path? First, contact your State Department of Labor to see if they have a formal apprenticeship program already in place. Chances are they do. If so, see what apprenticeship occupations they offer. If none are relevant to your boatyard environment, States are generally receptive to adding other occupations, including those specific to the recreational marine industry. Criteria for consideration include:

- Customarily learned in a practical way though a structured, systematic program of on-the-job (OJT), supervised training
- Clearly identified and commonly recognized throughout an industry
- Involves manual, mechanical or technical skills and knowledge which require a minimum of 2000 hours of OJT work experience
- Requires related classroom instruction to supplement the OJT training.

Recognized Apprenticeship host companies are called Sponsors. They must abide by the US Department of Labor's 'Standards of Apprenticeship', a guideline of apprenticeships to include wages, hours worked, safety, record keeping and completion, typically administered and enforced at the State level.

Sponsors are required to pay wages to Apprentices at a rate of at least 50% of average wage for that professional and no less than minimum wage. Per 1000 hours completed, Apprentices are expected to receive a wage increase.

The sources for apprentice applicants are typically high schools (targeting students who are not college bound), community colleges and workforce assistance programs. Most Apprenticeship programs require apprentices to be at least 18 years old. In some cases, apprenticeships may begin at age 16 or 17. Most trades will require a high school diploma or GED certificate.

The most common barrier to creating an apprenticeship program is satisfying the required classroom instruction portion of the model. If your state has a marine industry trade association, look to them to help you source possible education providers.

In summary, the creation of a successful apprenticeship program can be complex, administratively challenging and a long term process. Yet, once created, the apprenticeship model often leads to a better trained employee and one who is loyal to the employer who gave them a chance. Give it a shot and if you hit a road block, shoot me an e-mail and I'll help you navigate through.

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