

APPRENTICESHIP
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Matt Arnold

Building on Experience



My father is a tradesman, so I grew up doing all kinds of hands-on things with my Dad. I had also done some trade work in high school with people I met through my hobbies.

I had taken a power mechanics course in high school and a wood working class in grade nine. I think these courses should be mandatory. I had heard about pre-apprenticeship but it wasn't available when I was growing up.

I have always been interested in building things, so it was only natural for me to work in the construction field as a Carpenter. I had worked in the field a couple of years before I got my first apprenticeship, and I think I had worked for four employers before I got one.

It was hard at first to find an employer. Many don't fully understand the "in's and out's" of apprenticeships so they are reluctant to sign up apprentices. And many companies are smaller ones which don't have a broad selection of work so are hesitant about taking on an apprentice. But, for me, persistence paid off and it will for others as well.

I had worked very hard for several companies before I got my first apprenticeship. It was difficult, but I gained valuable experience. At the beginning, I just got jobs at entry level, like construction helper and labourer. It took some time to find an employer willing to take me on as an apprentice. But I was very interested in what I was doing and really wanted to learn the tricks of the trade to become a good tradesperson.

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In terms of what advice I could give to others, it's all about how strong a person you are (physically and mentally) and how far you are willing to go to get your apprenticeship. I had already completed my apprenticeship as a journeyman Carpenter and, while working in northern Alberta, began my second apprenticeship as a Millwright. Becoming a Millwright relates to the industrial turbine installations which I am now pursuing. I respect the journeyperson I have worked with learning my trade, and have learned a lot from my employers.

A major thing is finding out the ways the apprenticeship system works. Once you figure that out, you can make it work for you. I mean, you have to put yourself in the driver's seat and take an active role in your apprenticeship rather than expecting your employer to take care of it for you. From filling out the forms for switching employers to basically putting the papers in front of your employer for him to sign and getting them faxed yourself. I found it something to get used to with a lot of the simple things too, such as organizing to have your EI in place when you do go to school. Following up with the ITA was helpful as well in getting my things in order a little faster.

I just got back from Alberta where I was doing oilfield construction for Enbridge. I have been keeping in contact with some of my fellow classmates and have been networking with them, helping each other out in the job market. This winter I plan on doing some shopwork maybe in Edmonton rebuilding Gas Turbines. Work has been pretty slow this year and finding much to do in the trade has proven difficult as most companies want to hire Journeyperson. But you just have to get the resumes out there in vast numbers and follow up with a phone call a couple of weeks later. I find the best way to get a job is through a personal contact. Over the years, I have acquired a vast network of ties with people in the field. Most of the time you will get jobs through people you know, even those who you only talk to a few times a year.

Matt Arnold is living in Comox, BC. At 25-years old, he is in his 3rd year as an Apprentice Millwright and has already completed an apprenticeship as a journeyman Carpenter.

