The trainee uncovered

Generation Y: direct and confrontational – technology holds no fear.

In the third part of his discussion on training issues facing the industry, **Professor Harry Lovell** takes a closer look at the nature of today's employees/learners.

LOOKING TO the future we need to address the issue of training and education. Dealing with the technology area as distinct from the training of artisans, one of our problems is finding the people with not only the technical knowledge and scientific background but also the industrial experience which is essential in delivering education and training. It is a historical fact that the Australian Institute of Packaging (AIP) originally offered its courses through the higher technical education sector, only to withdraw them due to the lack of expertise within that education system. As a consequence, the pattern has been to call on academically qualified people with substantial industrial experience (and, above all, the ability to teach) to present the courses. In the AIP we have two outstanding tutors currently presenting the Diploma on-line who bring not only impeccable academic qualifications but a wealth of industry knowledge.

Generation Y

The challenges ahead are still substantial; among these is the emergence of Generation Y. Just for the record, Generation Y is officially regarded, according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, as those students who were born in the period 1982-2000 (Generation Z will be 2001+).

Youth has always had the facility to confuse the previous generation and it's no different with Generation Y but be aware that as you get older it is much easier to understand their attitudes and ideas. A similar model can be observed with grandchildren who are often better understood and afforded more tolerance by grandparents than their parents. Generation Y comprises people in a hurry (but wasn't that always the case with the young?). They are skeptical of the world they have entered; we have global issues of the environment, the prospect of diminishing natural resources all compounded by messages from the prophets of doom and gloom. Generation Y regards previous generations as responsible for these problems. They are direct and confronting; image is all important. However, they are not afraid to ask questions and to demand information. Equally, they are flexible and adaptable; technology holds no fears. Just as we accepted water coming from the tap and electricity available at the flick of a switch, the microchip and its derivatives are taken for granted. They are a learning generation, and learning has to be challenging, but on their terms. For them experiencing is important and they look for interaction and involvement in the learning process. They may be nomadic in terms of jobs, but they are conscious of socially responsible attitudes and policies such as their concerns not only with sustainability and the environment, but also with integrity, social rights and fair play. Their early exposure to marketing hype has given them an introduction to the need to get past the message and not be fooled. Hence employers need to be aware of these factors and endeavour to create challenging positions which will allow them to realise their full potential.

Hitherto, this has been a major weakness in packaging technology positions where the full development of the qualified technologist has not been realised in many companies. A lesson which still has to be learnt in many instances is that the trained qualified packaging

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technologist should be able to rise to the highest management level and until that becomes a commonly held approach the various sectors of industry will continue to struggle to find the people it needs.

Insurance policy

Currently we are in a period of full employment and there is no pressure on individuals to study or develop their knowledge. However, if this situation were to change then the holding of an internationally recognised qualification supported by appropriate skills and experience would act as an insurance policy. In the case of packaging a qualification such as the Diploma in Packaging has considerable currency due to its international recognition and the global activity in packaging.

We are an industry committed to taking account of our environment and more recently to sustainability. As these issues become more detailed and demanding, as in the case of the production and use of packaging, the need to have a detailed understanding of the materials, their properties and behaviour, becomes even more critical.

Generation Y is a learning generation, and learning has to be challenging, but on the learner's terms.

The emergence of accredited programs has gained impetus in recent years and we can expect to see them increase. It is true that the European Union has spawned their development through the need to monitor the directives of the EU, but as we export to that region we also have to accept these requirements. In the UK, for example, there is a national accrediting body through which all manner of training programs can gain official recognition. One such group relevant to our industry has been the British Retail Consortium which has developed a range of global standards and protocols covering a spectrum of applications. These include Food, Packaging, Product Recall, Consumer Products and more. Specifically, the *BRC/IOP Packing Standard Technical Standard and Protocol for Companies Manufacturing and Supplying Food Packaging Materials for Retailer Branded Products* was one of the first of these programs and now has a recognised Auditors program in support. At least one major Australian supermarket is adopting BRC programs and its influence could be expected to spread. We must not be averse to these developments if we are to uphold and promote ourselves as being at the cutting edge of technology, innovation and development.

In summary, we are no longer living in a global village, we have moved up to the next level. The world has got much smaller and this means change for our industry and above all wider acceptance of the need for professional qualifications. We must accept the challenge if we are to compete on equal terms.

The AIP has a proud and unequalled record of serving the industry's education and training needs.

It is important for industry that it embraces training and uses the programs that the AIP is able to provide conscious of the fact that these have international recognition and are supported by industrially experienced and professionally qualified people.

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Ph 03 9555 7600
Fax 03 9555 7606

New South Wales Office
Contact Maurice Tabone
Mobile 0421 635 954
Fax 02 4681 8028
maurice@scsplastics.com.au

Queensland Office
Contact Les Bugden
Mobile 0400 188 047
Fax 07 3711 2840
les@scsplastics.com.au

www.scsplastics.com.au