

Daunting start to a dream job

Billy Keily says obtaining an apprenticeship with a Karratha-based refrigeration and air-conditioning specialist is the best move he's ever made. The Apprenticeship Support Australia clients share their thoughts on training

THE MASTER

During his 37 years in the refrigeration and air-conditioning business, Director of Coldpoint Refrigeration Rob McWhirter has trained 15 apprentices.

How did you start out in this field? I gained my apprenticeship with Geraldton Building Company back in 1981, under Jimmy Hallinan, probably the best place an apprentice could learn all of the aspects covered in the field of refrigeration.

What's the benefit of hiring apprentices? Future proofing my business! Training up apprentices ensures that I have good techs coming through for the growth of my business. It also provides me with an opportunity to give back to the trade to ensure we have tradespeople with good skills.

How hard is it for them to adapt to your work practices when they have no experience? Sometimes it's a bit daunting for them. Especially when they have come straight from school and you drop them straight into doing 10-hour days. In summer you can see them hit the wall about two in the afternoon. But they soon adapt!

What's the most important piece of advice you can pass on to them? Commitment! If you are going to do something, then you commit and give it 110 per cent.

What have they taught you? Probably patience! It's easy to forget that apprentices don't know everything yet! That comes with experience.

What have they gone on to do after their training? This is probably the most rewarding part about having apprentices — all of my apprentices have stayed on and worked for me for extended periods. And for those who have left and gone onto different things, most have come back.

A few of my guys have then gone on and realised their dreams of having their own businesses. But they still ring me from time to time to ask for advice, whether it be a technical matter or just general information.

THE APPRENTICE

Billy Keily began his training with Coldpoint Refrigeration in February, 2016, and is about to begin the third year of his apprenticeship.

What do you do from day to day? My days change on a very regular basis. It's not usual that I find myself doing the same thing each day. One day I'll be working in an iron ore mine and the next on a ship and the next at a power station installing and repairing a vast range of refrigeration and air-conditioning equipment. My job placement at Coldpoint allows me to work on all aspects related to my trade.

The fact that a 40-degree day is a regular occurrence in the Pilbara, it certainly seemed like a great incentive to become a refrigeration specialist. But my first inspiration for the trade came as I discovered the large potential that came with the job and the many avenues that it can lead you down throughout a career.

What do you enjoy about your training? Although it was a bit overwhelming at first, it soon dawned on me that it was possibly the best decision I had ever made — and I am yet to change my mind on that fact. What I like most about my job is the cruisy nature of our work.

While we all have a high standard to uphold, there is never a dull moment. I also enjoy the endless knowledge to be shared amongst a team of experienced tradespeople. There is something new to be learnt every day — whether it be trade related or not.

What are your future aspirations? I'm not 100 per cent sure what my future holds and I'll see what specialty work lies ahead in my career. I hope my future involves working on some very large refrigeration equipment. Whether it's supermarket chillers or an ammonia plant, it all seems to spark my interest.

How important are your bosses? I know I'm receiving the best training possible with the combined experience that they have to offer to me. They all respect that I am trying my best to make the most of my apprenticeship and they all go out of their way to help with that goal. Without them, I wouldn't be the person I am today.

What's the best piece of advice they've given you? The best piece of advice I've ever received is to 'Never assume, because assumption is the mother of all mistakes', especially when you're cutting your last piece of angle and you are guessing the length you need. Also, never wash your beer glass with detergent because it will go flat quicker.

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