

On the Same Track: Railroad Component Manufacturer, Union Workers See Common Future After SkillPoint Training

Customer Challenge

Railroads are all about forward motion—and over time, the equipment and processes involved in manufacturing locomotives and railcars move ahead as well. One company, a leader in railcar components, uses a wide range of robots, industrial controllers, coilers, cranes, and other modern equipment at its foundry and manufacturing facility. The production equipment requires maintenance by skilled technicians.

For union shops like this one, keeping factory techs up-to-date in maintenance skills is difficult. Technicians retire, taking their knowledge with them, while established workers and union officials are often suspicious that changes in skills and job descriptions are true business imperatives.

To resolve its training issues and keep its factory at the forefront of the industry, the manufacturer turned to Advanced Technology Services' SkillPoint Technical Training Solutions for a competent, practical program—one that would satisfy both its technical needs and the concerns of its union workforce.

ATS Solution

Fitting training into union work rules is important, so ATS' ability to accommodate workplace constraints played a critical role in getting the program underway. Once company management and labor officials agreed that training was both necessary and viable, SkillPoint personnel set up classes in a meeting room at the factory, immediately off the shop floor. Practice machinery was brought in that was equipped with electrical circuitry and hydraulics identical to those used in the factory. Training was held during all work shifts—even during third shift—so technicians could easily attend sessions.

"It took quite a bit of work initially to convince our labor partners that this would work," recalled the company's human resources manager. "Not all of our technicians bought into the program—in fact one person resigned rather than agree to take on new skills. But the convenience of the SkillPoint program, combined with the support shown to our employees, helped us get buy-in."

An important objective of the training was to turn electricians into multi-craft technicians. To do this, SkillPoint was able combine its training classes with the component manufacturer's existing subscription to the Tooling U online curriculum.

AT A GLANCE

- Railway component manufacturer
- Union workforce
- Need for continuing technical training
- ATS SkillPoint onsite instruction
- 82% graduation rate
- Union requests additional classes

"We take pride in creating an executable solution that's tailored to a customer's situation," noted the ATS business development manager. "We combined Tooling U computer lab time with our hands-on training for maximum value."

Bottom-Line Success

SkillPoint instructors proved themselves adept at gaining the trust of the union personnel. One year into the program, nine of the manufacturer's technicians were set to graduate, for an expected completion rate of 82%.

"The SkillPoint trainers were actually approached by employees who were not participating in the program, simply to answer technical questions," commented the HR manager. "We've been able to build the trust needed to transform our electricians into multi-craft technicians, which is a very difficult skillset to find in the marketplace. Best of all, union officials are now advocating for additional SkillPoint training to increase their members' job satisfaction and security."

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– Human Resources Manager