STEVE JOHNSON

Biographical Sketch

In our family, my two brothers and I were brought up under our fathers strict mandate to "remember that someone will have to maintain this" whenever we built or repaired anything. So from then on, remolding homes, rebuilding old gas engines, building motorcycles, and cars became a "process" not to be taken lightly with how it should be maintained always front and center. This thought process also helped me in the cabinet shop where I built high end furniture for many years while assuming woodworking would be my calling---but I found something even more satisfying with injection molds.

The "think it through" training continued in the navy where a similar military code was pounded into me for 6 years on a daily basis in the repair and maintenance of a dozen A-4L Skyhawk fighters. "Freelancing" engine repairs and cleaning schedules did not happen "when we had the time". Everything was done on a timely manner, using a proven and regulated manual and a documented procedures that you *would* abide to---or bad things happened---either with the jet—or us.

We learned that the hardest part of repairing and maintaining anything mechanical revolved just as much around the discipline to do the right thing at the right time as any procedure. A prerequisite to acquiring the discipline to do it right even when no one is looking is having a love and respect for the mechanical thing you are maintaining or building and the high regard for the tools and skills used to build it.

After I left the military, I took a job as a toolmaker with Calmar, Inc. repairing and maintaining, then after a few years, redesigning and rebuilding, high cavitation close-tolerance multi cavity molds for the personal care and medical industry. My first day on the job they set an old insulated hot runner on my bench and "here Johnson, fix this". I asked where the maintenance manual was and they threw me a log book with handwritten scribbles. This was the motivation needed to begin developing MoldTrax, a documentation system for molds, and as of today--- the only one like it in the industry--- bar none.

I remained at Calmar for the next 24 years honing my craft along with the MoldTrax system, and taking evening courses for several years in Mechanical Design at Southern State Community College (I did not get a degree). Along the way I also began looking for articles on injection mold repair and found none. I was invited to write one (Suzy Witzer 1998) that appeared in Injection Mold Magazine. From that article I was invited to create a 4, then 8 hr. Mold Maintenance course to present around the country for a training company called TechTracks (no relation to MoldTrax). I did this and things kind of took off. I got much exposure to other companies and their maintenance issues---which afforded me a great learning period in my career on how other companies and craftsmen viewed and handled mold maintenance.

In 1999, after a seminar in Chicago, I was invited to interview for a Tooling Managers position with Abbott Labs in Ashland Oh. I took the job, made the jump from blue-shirt to white, moved 124 miles north and lived in a garage for 3 years until my wife and 2 daughters could join me which they did. Not healthy for the family life but left me much time to keep focus on ways to improve mold performance through better maintenance efficiency.

I released MoldTrax in 2000 and also set it up at various Abbott plants during my 8 years there. I also continued to do seminars and met Glenn and Don Starkey for the first time at a MoldMaking Technology show where I was presenting.

Abbott became Hospira in 2002, then shut down our facility in 2004, moving our molds to Costa Rica. At this time, the brothers offered me the opportunity to take maintenance training to the next level---out of hotels and into a facility---so I came aboard and began building the Toolingdocs Maintenance Training center here in Ashland. And oh what fun it was!! I love setting up shops.

I continued to write and instruct seminars and then embark on creating different maintenance courses for TD, for the plastics/tooling industry.

Over the past 4 years, I developed 6 different maintenance courses that instruct on the technical and physical side of this craft and the machine and hand tools necessary to perform it efficiently, accurately and safely. Of this I am most proud as I had no proven path or script to follow. It's about common mechanical sense, pride of workmanship and the discipline to do it right, and follow procedures where necessary.

Our products, methods and systems are being used around the globe and as of this writing, we are the only company that specializes in this field. I feel honored to be a driving part of that and appreciative of the Starkey brothers for giving me the opportunity to grow this unique and challenging trade.

I hope to continue to write and create more courses that will continue to provide value to the folks who work in the plastics molding industry.

Steve Johnson

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