



National Apprenticeship Week



NEIL GRIMLEY

Name: Neil Grimley
Current Position: Site Director – Energy & Renewables
Location/Site: px House, Stockton
First Apprenticeship position: Electrician at ICI Billingham
Apprenticeship start date: September 1985

Can you tell us about how you started out as an Apprentice?

I started my Apprenticeship in 1985 at ICI Billingham, just up the road from px House in Stockton. My father and my brother had both worked there so I had a good appreciation and exposure to the type of work, as well as an understanding of the Apprenticeship scheme there and the job prospects upon the scheme's completion. ICI was the area's largest employer at the time, so it was a big opportunity for me.

Why did you want to do an apprenticeship?

I simply wanted an Apprenticeship so that I could learn a trade that would set me up for my career. I wasn't too keen on staying on at school, which would have meant missing out on the practical side of the training - I wanted to get my hands dirty sooner rather than later!

What was the most valuable aspect of the apprenticeship program, and how did it help you further your career in the future?

Definitely the mix of practical and educational training - it allowed me to have a full trade background and gain the associated qualifications that would enable me to progress my career if I want to go down that route. There was a great range of discipline and variations in the work, and that gave me a diverse overview of what it's like to work on industrial facilities. That exposure helped me see the various roles on site and also helped me consider and narrow down what I wanted to do as my career progressed.

How did the apprenticeship program enable you to apply your knowledge from your studies?

The ICI apprentice school and local College had a great working relationship - a factor which is so critical to the success of Apprenticeship programmes and the Apprentices themselves. We could take our knowledge learned at college and bring that to site, where I could use it during practical training. We were always encouraged to go out to the various ICI plants and witness various types of work to allow us to put the theory and practical training together.

How has your career progressed since starting out as an apprentice?

Whilst I served my apprenticeship at another company, the skills and experience learnt during these times allowed me to join px Group in a slightly different role from my initial training, but use my skill set to enhance the position and progress my career. My initial role was as an Operations Technician, but have since worked my way through the levels of management (Shift Manager, Operations Engineer, Operations Manager, Commissioning Manager, Plant Manager, Manager of Site Operations) to where I am today as Site Director - Energy & Renewables.

What skills did you learn as an apprentice?

A big part of my apprenticeship was around team building and working together. As I served my apprenticeship in a purpose-built training school, we worked closely as a group to get tasks completed. We also attended regular team building events at outward-bounds facilities to ensure we all could work together and respect each other's skill set.

Why is National Apprenticeship Week so important to the engineering and energy sectors?

It's very important to recognise apprenticeships and the importance of investing in our young people to learn a trade to maintain the industry, as well as giving them valuable skills to set up their career.

What skills have stuck with you throughout your career at px Group?

The importance of respecting others that you work with, and not judging others by your own approach. We are all individuals, and have our own characters. Always be prepared to listen to others opinions.

What do you enjoy about working at px Group?

Since joining px Group, my career has gone from strength to strength. px Group has always recognised hard work and is flexible enough that it rewards the people who want to progress in the business. The teams I work with are fantastic and dedicated to their work, and always willing to support each other.

What's the best piece of advice you received as an apprentice?

Persevere with tasks, and don't be afraid to ask for assistance if need be. You can't know everything and we all need to learn at some stage.

What advice would you give to those considering an apprenticeship?

An apprenticeship is a great way to start your career path and get both a practical and academic qualification to set you up with a trade skill that will allow you to move on to bigger and better things as your experience grows.

"I'd encourage anyone to consider the apprenticeship route to starting their career. It's a great grounding and will give you a range of skills, both practically and socially, to set you up for the future."