

Talking Skills with Tiger Trailers

How long has the Tiger Trailers been trading and what is the story behind your success?

Having a wealth of experience running the Cartwright Group, John and Steven Cartwright started Tiger Trailers in April 2014 and created a modern, state-of-the-art manufacturing facility, consolidated under one factory roof.

This was the first time in over 20 years that a new UK manufacturer had arrived in the marketplace and we've gone from strength to strength ever since.

John and Steven were quickly joined by a highly experienced team of industry professionals and the building of Tiger's factory began. In October 2014 after only six months, a lot of hard work and determination, our first Tiger trailer rolled off the production line. Today we are still a privately owned, family business and we're rapidly growing into one of the UK's leading manufacturers. In a short space of time, we've attracted a diverse range of customers, from the haulage, logistics, retail and parcel sectors of the industry. All this growth has happened quickly and so things have been very busy for all of us, but this has made Tiger Trailers an exciting place to work.

How have the staff you employ changed?

Well, at the beginning in April 2014 we started with 8 employees. We now have 170 staff across the factory/HQ so you can see there has been a lot of growth. 12 new apprentices have just started with us which takes our total number of apprentices up to 28. Over the last two years we have mainly been recruiting to roles involved in the manufacture of trailers, this hasn't changed dramatically.

So, what exact job roles do you have in Tiger trailers and what roles will you need in the future?

As I mentioned earlier, a lot of the roles in the factory are involved in the making of the trailers. This involves jobs such as commercial vehicle bodybuilders, welders/fabricators, fitters, auto electricians/pipe and wiring, paint sprayers and pre delivery inspection. You need people performing all of these roles to get a trailer made and ready for use. Alongside the production team we have a very skilled design office, sales team, aftersales and parts, IT, stores/materials management, finance and HR of course. In the future I can see us needing more of all the skilled roles involved in manufacture as we have a lot of orders coming through and looking forward, some of the skilled bodybuilders and paint sprayers aren't as young as they used to be! 😊

What are the main skills challenges your business is facing?

One of the key challenges we have is ensuring we develop a workforce for the future. Practical manufacturing skills are key to this, and this is why we have set up our apprenticeship scheme to train up local young people to take us forward. Body builders in particular are always in short supply, which is reflected across the sector. Body builders tend to be very loyal employees; often starting as apprentices with a business and the good ones are then taken on by the business at the end of their apprenticeship. They then often stay with that company for the rest of their working life. We ensure our apprentices and trainees are mentored by skilled staff so they can learn from the guys who have a lifetime of experience to pass on. Involving our suppliers in training has also allowed us to develop the skillsets further.

So you've recruited apprentices? What does your scheme involve?

Yes, having an apprenticeship scheme is very important to us as we want new staff who will grow with us. Our apprenticeship scheme runs in partnership with Mid-Cheshire College. Before new apprentices start working on our shop floor they get one week of training at college to teach them the basic workshop skills and safe working practices. After this is completed they come into our factory and start getting stuck in.

Our apprentices learn and experience all the major manufacturing stages in the production process. They work with a skilled mentor and spend 4 months in each department (including fabrication, chassis build, assembly, air and electrical systems through to trailer completion) in their first and



second year, before specialising within one area in their 3rd year. We support them throughout the programme with regular reviews and assessments at each key stage. Alongside this they go to college on day release where they receive workshop training to ensure they achieve the required standards for the Level 3 Advanced Apprenticeship in Engineering Manufacturing that they gain alongside their practical experience.

How did you go about setting up an apprentice scheme and choosing a training provider?

We carefully considered where we needed trained staff and went from there. Before choosing Mid-Cheshire College as our apprenticeship partner we looked at what a number of colleges had to offer. We made the decision to work with Mid-Cheshire as they were able to develop a bespoke apprenticeship programme for us. We always receive lots of applications for our apprenticeship places, but we do promote our scheme quite widely through our website and through Mid-Cheshire College.

How are the current apprentices doing so far?

They're doing really well, so much so that we are looking to recruit more apprentices!

What do you look for in an apprentice?

The most important thing we are looking for in a potential candidate is the ability for an individual to apply themselves. The level 3 apprenticeship requires candidates to have a Grade A-C in Maths and English. However, if we identify a good candidate that doesn't have the right grades we are willing to put in additional support to help them. Age isn't a barrier either. We have just taken on two 16 year old apprentices who have demonstrated great potential and we want to nurture them to grow in the business: we also take on older candidates. Like most businesses in this sector we struggle to attract young women to apply which is a shame. At the moment we only have one woman on the shop floor but we would love to have many more.

What have the main challenges been with the apprenticeship scheme? How were you able to resolve these?

The whole apprenticeship process is very complicated and can be confusing to navigate; this has been our main challenge so far. We recognise that this isn't the fault of the colleges it's the system that currently exists. Luckily, I have some previous experience of setting up apprenticeship schemes so I could draw on this.



Have you done much work with local schools?

To be honest we have been so busy setting up our apprenticeship programme that we haven't had the time or energy to form and grow any relationships with schools but this is definitely something we want to do moving forward. Schools are where our future apprentices will come from and so we would be very interested in delivering presentations at schools and doing factory tours for students so more young people know about what we're doing and consider applying to work here in the future. However, at the moment we aren't in a position to provide work experience opportunities due to Health & Safety requirements.

Have you had any university students or graduates in doing placements?

We've recently had two engineering design university students working with us for two weeks who worked closely with our design team. We've also had a student from Preston University working here for a year on an Industrial Work Placement; this was a very successful and is something we would look to repeat. We've actually now offered this student a job when he finishes University so it's been successful all round!

“It is essential to the future of the business to ensure we have a skilled workforce. We are committed to continuing to build on our current apprenticeship programme and invest in training for all our employees.”