

Training the trades

Steve Smith, M.AIRAH, is head teacher of refrigeration and air conditioning at Nepean TAFE's Kingswood Campus in New South Wales.

Responsibilities

I'm responsible for the health and welfare of students and staff, and for planning course delivery patterns, class group attendance, and attendance schedules for teachers. I also manage the section budget, which includes payroll, consumables and training resources. I liaise with employers, parents and industry associations, and identify and create commercial "short course" training opportunities.

Specialities

Most industry people would associate me with training people in the use of flammable refrigerants, hydrocarbons and now R32.

Passions

Identifying new practical exercises that provide the students with a rich understanding of the primary concepts of the trade course (and reduce the time spent sitting in a theory class!). I'm also passionate about creating a trade course that is relevant to today's employers, students and teachers, while also building new, visually rich electronic delivery tools to assist with understanding. Some of the underpinning HVAC&R knowledge has been historically considered boring or tiresome, but these tools, eventually web-based, will provide an opportunity for students to obtain relevant information at home or in the workplace.

Challenges

There's quite a few at the moment. The state government is changing the way TAFENSW will be funded in 2015, and apprentice numbers have been declining over the past three years.

The level of literacy and numeracy our new apprentices possess is sharply declining, and the need to provide basic literacy and numeracy training is placing

pressure on our ability to provide the primary trade training. Finally, the content within the trade course has been growing over the past 20 years – given the rapid changes in technology – but nothing has been removed.

Finest professional hour

Travelling around NSW providing "Train the Trainer" on hydrocarbon and carbon dioxide refrigerants. It gave me an opportunity to catch up with all my colleagues around the state and see how they deliver training. It's amazing what you can learn.

Greatest personal achievement

Receiving an Advanced Diploma in Management, with a distinction.

Lessons learned

Avoid burning any bridges. We are a unique and small community of professionals who tend to know each other.

Professional development

I own a small business that I maintain primarily to keep me current with industry trends and changes in technology. I also communicate with numerous industry associations like AIRAH, AREMA, RACCA and AMCA, together with my local employers.

Words of wisdom

To truly savour success, one must taste failure.

Describe yourself

Usually relaxed and easy-going, with a sense of humour and a penchant for new challenges that will expand my abilities or understanding.



Steve Smith, M.AIRAH

Favourite destination

The beaches around the Central Coast.

Favourite book

Anything by Tom Clancy or Clive Cussler ... the exploits of Jack Ryan and Dirk Pitt are always packed with adrenalin.

Favourite film

A tough call ... Standouts are *Dances with Wolves*, *Braveheart*, and most recently *Avatar*. They touch all the emotions.

Favourite website

A day won't go past when I'm not on the internet, but it would be remiss of me not to mention www.airah.org.au

I also frequent www.slkworld.com/australia. I drive a beautiful black SLK350 with all the AMG options ... it's a mid-life crisis!

What is success to you?

Having a positive, life-changing impact on another individual's existence.

What does AIRAH mean to you?

Up-to-date information on the latest changes in industry, together with greater access to the thoughts and opinions of others in the industry. ■