

Apprenticeships: Making good business sense

By John Son

“Level-headed, takes a common sense approach, and thinks outside the square. His time management and customer service skills, as well as his honesty and integrity, are invaluable.”

Those are the words that Colin Leeming, director of Hamilton-based Matrix Electrical, used to describe his newest apprentice. Colin has been taking on apprentices since 2010, and signed up his latest one earlier this year through The Skills Organisation.

Like thousands of those in New Zealand’s trades industries, Colin has made apprenticeships a core part of his business – and has reaped the benefits time and time again.

So what is it about apprenticeships that make them so appealing to Matrix Electrical, along with thousands of Kiwi businesses across the country?

You can train new staff your own way.

Signing up an apprentice allows you to train new staff just the way you want. While all apprenticeships follow the structure of a qualification, their flexible nature means you can tailor the training to the unique needs of your business.

Apprenticeships are now more sophisticated than ever, so your business can focus on equipping staff with the specific, high-level skills it needs.

As Colin puts it, it’s no longer about “just about following a more experienced tradie around and doing odd jobs for them”.

“At Matrix, we focus on giving apprentices ownership of a project and monitoring them throughout,” he adds.

You can future-proof your business.

An apprentice isn’t just there to work during the summer break or between jobs. They’re a long-term asset – one that can start providing value to your business pretty quickly.

Many successful apprentices go on to work for their company for years to come, moving quickly up the ladder if they’re determined. It’s common to see apprentices rise through the ranks to take on management roles at the company where they started.

Not only is your business investing in its future workforce, it’s also helping invest in your staff’s future and career.

There are lots of opportunities for any business to nurture a long-term relationship with an apprentice. For example, Colin offers stakes in the Matrix Electrical business to staff who have been with them for a while.

“We like to offer the right opportunities to the right people and give them opportunities to contribute to the business. It’s about retaining the right people long-term,” he says.

You can still keep your business running as usual.

There’s a common misconception that apprentices need to spend lots of time off work, but that’s far from the case.



Apprentices do need to do off-job training at times, for example to brush up on their theory. However, most of these are timed so they take place after work hours and present minimal disruption to your business.

The vast majority of the training is on the job, at the workplace. Your apprentices learn valuable skills while contributing to your business at the same time!

You can do your bit for the industry and economy.

Apprenticeships are certainly a worthwhile investment for your business, and they’re also great for your industry and the economy.

By investing in your business’s future workforce, you’re also investing in New Zealand’s talent pool – which is crucial given the increasing demand for skilled labour.

At the same time, you’re helping to tackle youth unemployment, as apprenticeships are a great way for young Kiwis to start long, fulfilling careers. Providing them with a nationally recognised qualification for life isn’t a bad add-on either!

“Apprenticeships teach skill sets in a market that’s screaming out for tradespeople,” Colin says.

“We’re committed to the future of the industry and developing new people to hand the baton to.”

Thanks to industry training organisations (ITOs) such as The Skills Organisation, employers looking to sign up an apprentice have all the support they need. The Skills Organisation is one of the largest ITOs in New Zealand, working with more than 20 industries, each of which have New Zealand qualifications available for their employees.

Apprenticeships are certainly a no-brainer for any business that wants to prepare itself, and the industry, for the future. Are you prepared to take on an apprentice today?

skills.