

CASE STUDY:

APPRENTICE STRATEGIES DRIVING BUSINESS GROWTH

COMPANY: Volvo Cars Southern Highlands

HOTSPOT REGION: Southern Highlands/Shoalhaven

TARGET:

- Apprentices helping establish organisational benchmarks
- Promoting long term careers in the automotive industry
- How apprenticeship programs can help talented youth to flourish

Volvo Cars Southern Highlands is a family owned business who has been operating in Moss Vale in the NSW Southern Highlands since 1977. The Volvo brand who strives for excellence across all areas, setting the benchmark in the prestige automotive space, committed to providing a level of service that consistently exceeds customer expectations. Today, Volvo Cars are one of the most well-known and respected premium car brands, preparing for a new future that will be all-electric, autonomous and connected. Steve Key, Service Manager and Master Technician Simon Mills share their experiences of recruiting Apprentices within the Automotive Industry.

Influencing candidate expectations is the key

Volvo Cars have found interest in automotive pathways has declined with the current generation of youth, making it significantly more challenging attracting new talent to that business. Steve says "Apprentice wages may start low, and you may earn more initially at your local supermarket, but a good Technician can earn significantly more. Short term pain for long term gain. We have found that young people who do enter the industry expect to work on cars immediately, and the expectations created by the media as to what working on cars is like, does not always match reality. The Automotive trade can have a bad name, as many dealers "chew through Apprentices". Using them as cheap labour instead of nurturing their development."

Commitment to "local jobs for local people"

Volvo is vastly aware of its responsibility to the local community, providing much needed entry-level career opportunities in a small job market. Steve adds "We try to utilise local schools with Work Experience to try them out. If they do well we ask them to return for two weeks trial then proceed. We try to be as selective as possible rather than employing the masses and hoping one works out. We want them to feel that we have invested in them specifically. This way you get to test their commitment and give them a good look at what they will be doing to make sure its what they want to do long term" We have been around for a long time and its all part of the relationship of trust we want to build with our customers." Steve said there were additional benefits in supporting the local community. "We try to build as a culture amongst our staff so that customers feel important. They get that from everyone that works here. As an organisation, we sponsor local Hockey and Soccer. We engage in local charitable events to engage and support the local community. This helps with identifying potential future talent."

Apprentices supporting business growth

Steve said that apprentices are the only true way to develop the skills needed by the business. "We understand the need to grow our technicians so we can have good qualified guys to assist with our cars and have them trained and set expectations of what we require from them. Shifting and pulling staff from other businesses does not work. The quality of those that you gain is not always to Volvo standards. Growing your own allows you to mould the next generation to your way. The government funding helps a little but its more about making sure the business is sustainable with quality work. Funding can be used to support costs associated with Volvo's training program and the low productivity initially associated with a first and second-year apprentice. Volvo's training program involves eight one-week training blocks per year. Training costs can be expensive but the return on investment further down the track make it worthwhile."

Apprentice recruitment- helping build strong values and culture

Volvo has identified that its apprentice strategies have a positive impact across the broader business. "It allows us to maintain a good staff mixture and keeps the customer seeing familiar faces, further enhancing the trust. During the height of COVID, Volvo Cars Southern Highlands made no redundancies. They felt it necessary to "push through" and retain their talent for when things picked-up. The Automotive industry is a fast-evolving industry that will keep those who wish to learn engaged. This is through a mix of training, good support staff and quality processes. Anyone who wants to join the industry and Volvo Cars Southern Highlands must want to be progressive and not solely 'Tread Water'"

CASE STUDY- successful careers in Automotive


Apprentice: Blaize Mills

Employer: Volvo Cars Southern Highlands

Apprenticeship: 4th Year Automotive - Light Vehicle Mechanical Technology Certificate III

The business employs a father-son team of Simon and Blaize Mills. Dad, Simon is one of Volvo's top Master Technicians within Australia. Emulating in Dad's footsteps is son Blaize. Blaize is a 4th-year apprentice graduating from the Volvo Modern Apprentice Program. This father and son combination have placed in the Volvo Vista National Competition and continue to lead the way in terms of continual professional development.

Simon Mills, Volvo Master Technician at Volvo Cars Southern Highlands, offered Blaize the opportunity to join him in Australia in 2016 after completing year 12 in the UK. Blaize was in a very fortunate position to be offered an Apprenticeship in Australia before his arrival. However, from that point onwards it has been a combination of Blaize's own hard work and the support afforded to him by Volvo Cars Southern Highlands that has seen him flourish.



Blaize completed his training through a combination of TAFE and a private RTO. Blaize credits both training organisations as “amazing” and “beneficial” experiences.

Starting at 7:30am, Blaize’s typical day involves carrying general servicing work. On occasion, Blaize likes to test his skills and is “thrown the odd spanner”, undertaking diagnostic work utilising the latest diagnostic equipment and techniques to challenge himself and continually progress his professional development and knowledge of Volvo vehicles. Working alongside his Dad, Blaize works on Volvo’s latest vehicles and innovations, ensuring that he stays at the forefront of cutting edge Automotive technology.

Blaize participated in Volvo’s 2019/20 annual VISTA competition. This competition tests all Volvo Technical staff to identify the country’s finest Technician’s, who will go on to represent Australia in the Volvo World Finals. In the initial rounds, the team were sitting in 1st place in Australia and making it to the national finals. Their team were the only finalists to feature an apprentice. They were also the only finalists to feature a father-son combination. This bodes well not only for next years competition, but is a great sign for the future of the business.

Blaize’s advice to anyone seeking a career in the Automotive trade is “get a trade behind you. If you start it, finish it.”