CLOSE UP

Education and Training for Production Employees

Mazda is united in its efforts to cultivate competent employees who inherit their predecessors' world-class technical skills

In the belief that advanced manufacturing technology is founded on skilled production, Mazda is cultivating a new generation of highly skilled production workers through a wide range of education and training programs, as well as working to preserve the spirit of craftsmanship and ensure the transmission of valuable skills to younger workers.

Smoothly meshing hypoid gears allow cars to run with less noise and better stability

In the Advanced Technical Skills Training Course, skills needed for car manufacturing are handed down from one generation to the next

Despite increasing automation through use of robots and computers, manufacturing still requires the sophisticated touch of skilled production workers. Unfortunately, the highly skilled production workers at the core of Japanese manufacturing are aging and their numbers are decreasing. The Japanese manufacturing industry is faced with the difficult task of ensuring that advanced technical skills are handed down to a new generation.

With this in mind, in July 1996 Mazda launched a groundbreaking Advanced Technical Skills Training Course aimed at preserving the technical skills necessary for motor vehicle manufacturing and cultivating a new generation of highly skilled production workers. For this program, we have selected 22 highly specialized techniques, vital to motor vehicle manufacturing, to be handed down from one generation of craftspeople to the next. To enable this, a two-year course was designed where a small class, consisting of one teacher and two learners, work together for the handing down of techniques and sharing of sensibilities. During the two years, the teacher and learners leave their previous divisions behind to focus on the acquisition of skills in the "Densho Dojo" learning center specially designed for the purpose, located on the manufacturing floor. Teachers who complete the course acquire the title of "Production Engineering Meister," a Mazda in-house designation. By making every possible effort to build an organization-wide system for the transmission of technical skills, we have succeeded not only in boosting the motivation of those selected to hand down their skills, but also in creating a climate in which these skills are deeply respected.

In all, 98 employees have completed the program, and 45 have attained the title of Production Engineering Meister. Of these, 16 have gone on to become Advanced Skilled Production Workers, 12 Contemporary Master Craftsman, and five recipients of the Medal with Yellow Ribbon, high honors that are recognized not only within the Mazda organization, but throughout society as a whole.

VOICE

Skills inherited from our predecessors are among Mazda's precious assets. I'm committed to passing them on to younger generations

Hypoid gears play an important role in stable driving performance, and manufacturing them requires sophisticated skill and precision at a scale measured in microns. It took 25 years before I was allowed to handle the manufacture of prototype fabrication parts. That I have now achieved the rank of Contemporary Master Craftsman is due to the wealth of advanced skills and techniques I've inherited, a precious gift from those who mastered them before me.

Feeling a sense of crisis due to the shrinking number of employees possessing advanced production skills, I took a two-year sabbatical from my work starting in 2000 in order to act as a teacher and transmit these skills to younger employees. By now, these employees are acting as teachers themselves.

Acquiring such skills is not difficult. I believe that anyone who concentrates closely on the work in front of them, stays true to the essentials, and completes each task carefully one after the next can attain the level of skill befitting a Contemporary Master Craftsman. I hope younger employees will listen seriously to the words of their supervisors and co-workers in their own divisions and related divisions, and strive to master the advanced production skills that we depend on.

To keep making cars that please our customers, we will continue to hone our production skills and hand them down—as Mazda's most precious assets—to younger generations.

Isamu Shibata
Powertrain Production Department No. 1
Hiroshima Plant

Mr. Shibata is highly skilled in the fabrication of hypoid gears, which serve to transmit the power of the engine to the axle. He was named a Production Engineering Meister under the Mazda accreditation system in 2002, and in November 2008 was awarded the title of Contemporary Master Craftsman by the Minister of Health, Labour and Welfare.