

The Impact of COVID-19 on Training

EVERY 2020 workshop and seminar after February was cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Dave Barkley, Director of Training for Electronics Inc., shares how he manages EI's training program during these trying times in the following interview.

The Shot Peener: Describe the challenges of scheduling and re-scheduling workshops and seminars in 2020.

Dave: The biggest challenge was not knowing when this will be over, and where. I held on to dates for as long as I could hoping things would get better, but it kept dragging on. Hotels were accommodating; some more than others.

The Shot Peener: Are you conducting on-site training programs this year?

Dave: Yes, but the financial strain and lockdowns keep things mostly quiet. It's no secret that it's a difficult time for the aviation industry, and they make up the majority of our private trainings. Budgets are restricted and parked aircraft have led to reduced tech staffing. Normally, a reduction in staffing leads to training as those taking on new roles need to be properly trained in critical processes. This is where the lockdowns are slowing us down, which may be dangerous. A shop realizes they have need for our training, but facilities are preventing outside visitors. Then there is the problem with crossing borders. Some countries, as well as some states in the U.S., are requiring quarantine periods. In most cases I'm willing to do this, but companies aren't willing to pay for me to watch movies in a hotel for days before a training.

The Shot Peener: How do you organize on-site training sessions during the pandemic?

Dave: During private trainings, I follow the requirements outlined by my on-site contact. It is usually a commonsense approach such as maintaining a social distance and using hand sanitizer. If requested, I'll wear a face shield. It is also important to recognize and explain any action that might be misunderstood. For example, talking all day is hard on my voice, so I often take cough drops during the day to prevent my throat from drying out. Once a student reported that I was "seriously ill." Taking the cough drops and using copious amounts of hand sanitizer left him with that impression.

The Shot Peener: Do you take an alternative approach to training? For example, do you use Zoom video conferencing?

Dave: No. I'm not a fan of online training for many reasons. Mostly, because being on-site personalizes the training. It's beneficial having the training group on their shop floor and

examining their own equipment. Often one of the group already has knowledge or experience with their process, and I enlist them to share relevant information to the group throughout the training. Everyone gets more information than what can come through a camera.

Then there's the value of personal interaction. Training sessions last only a couple days and being physically present allows me to gage the students' comprehension and react accordingly. If I notice someone isn't keeping up, I can give them individual help. I often ask another student that "gets it" to get involved which promotes teamwork. If most of the group is having a hard time with a topic, I can go over the material again from a different angle using scenarios based on their process.

The last point I'll make concerns the quality of our certification. We train people in a critical process and an individual is expected to have a certain level of understanding when we're done. With the probability of a student using "exam aids" during online training, accurate evaluation and certification of an individual are not guaranteed. There are a few managers that only want a piece of paper stating their employee is qualified, regardless if they are or not. In-person testing maintains the integrity of our certification program.

The Shot Peener: When do you anticipate workshops and seminars to return?

Dave: When pandemic fears subside. Once things start getting back to normal, there will be a big need for training. With help from our training partners around the world, I'm scheduling our 2021 training events. It's still a fluid situation, so I suggest people visit shotpeeningtraining.com to keep up to date.

The Shot Peener: Thank you, Dave! ●



Dave Barkley leads an on-site training class