

Brandon Latouf: Sheet Metal

by Stu Rhodes

The first time I met Brandon Latouf, he was referred to me by his ninth-grade English teacher, Ms. Cunningham. He was struggling, not just in her class, but with school in general. He told me all the things he wasn't good at, especially math. Then he said he might be interested in a trade of some sort. Little flags went up when he said that; math is such an integral part of almost every trade.

We continued to talk and I thought I would see if he really was "bad at math." We started slowly, but before long he was answering some pretty complex but contextual questions. (So he wasn't really bad at math. He just thought he was because he couldn't figure out where to use it.)

Fast forward a few months and Brandon found himself in the TASK (Trade Awareness Skills & Knowledge) program and loving learning for the first time since early elementary school.

TASK is a trades exploration program where students sample seven different trades. Carpentry is the first trade, and figures prominently in the program. Brandon was immediately hooked on the "learning by doing" concept in the TASK program and applied to be in the district carpentry program. "I really liked carpentry, and would have probably stuck with it had we not been introduced to sheet metal later in the program," said Brandon. "In sheet metal I absolutely love how we take 2D material and turn it into 3D stuff, right from layout to finished product."

Brandon kept his commitment to do the carpentry program he'd applied for, and was one of the stronger students in the class. But instead of doing his work experience placement with a framing contractor, he did it with Flynn Canada, a local architectural sheet metal contractor. The work experience placement grew into summer employment, and Brandon was in heaven. Flynn has taken a number of Saanich students on placements over the years and several have completed their entire apprenticeship under guided and compassionate mentorship inspired by company president Dave Flint.

Dave's wisdom around mentorship was very evident when he suggested easing Brandon into the rigours of the workforce by having him work three days a week during the summer. Brandon's mom agreed: "The gradual transition was perfect."

In September it was back to school, but Brandon missed the comradery of working at Flynn and the relevance of what he was doing. In stepped career counsellor Heidi Hackman, who proposed a personal learning plan for Brandon that allowed him to work 12 to 16 hours a week at Flynn while at the same time completing his academic requirements at Saanichton Individual Learning Centre. This plan was made absolutely perfect when Dave Flint agreed to welcome Brandon back as his newest sheet metal apprentice!

Brandon's foreman, Tyler Flint, says he appreciates the enthusiasm and great attitude Brandon brings to the job each day. His mom, Kathy Latouf, is thrilled.

"Brandon loves working at Flynn, and he actually enjoys going to school now too, because he has a plan. Flynn helped him grow up."

A teary-eyed mom said: "They are a beautiful company."

When I reminded Brandon of our first talk, he said: "I can't believe how much math I use now, and how much math I know. We use math so much at work, but it makes sense now. To think, I used to think I sucked at math."

Brandon admits he felt a little lost and defeated in grades nine and 10, but had this to offer:

"If you think you aren't good at anything, you're 100% wrong. Everyone is good at something. Check out TASK. I found something I'm good at, and discovered my passion."

Brandon's passion was certainly evident during our interview, and he is certainly is one of our young "Men to Watch" as an up-and-comer in our community in the trade of sheet metal, mentored by our amazing community partner Dave Flint and his team at Flynn Canada.

Contact Wendy Walker at ILC for more information on TASK. Contact Stu Rhodes at 250-415-9211 for more information on how to get involved as a student apprentice, or as an employer sponsor in this, or any other career program in Saanich School District. View the promotional YouTube video, "Jump Start Your Career" at <http://tinyurl.com/lt9wpzp>.

