

**GOT A
TRADE?**
**GOT IT
MADE!™**



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BEN NORTON

Fitting & Machining Engineer

By Deborah Hadry

The day after their last high school exams, most teenagers would be sleeping in. Ben Norton, however, had other plans. Straight after his last Physics exam in Year 13, he started his apprenticeship in Mechanical Engineering at Compac Sorting Equipment. Since then, he has never looked back.

This may not be too much of a surprise, considering that Ben's passion and interest in mechanical engineering started from a very young age. While most children would be playing with their toys, Ben was more interested in taking them apart. He didn't draw with colours, only pencils, something that initially worried his parents, but it was because Ben used such precise and accurate details that he could never get the colour in.

He was top of his engineering class, two years in a row. Ben was always interested in the fine details, and being an avid petrol-head, mechanical engineering was an obvious career choice.

The Macleans College alumnus had his sights set on being an apprentice, in part thanks to his Engineering teacher, Corrie Lindgreen. His teacher – who Ben fondly calls Lindgreen – introduced the concept of the apprenticeship to him. Ben recalls how the support of Lindgreen, who he sees as his mentor and role model, motivated and inspired him to take on an apprenticeship.

Within five minutes of talking to Ben, it's clear he has passion and enthusiasm for what he does. He loves turning scraps into something functional.

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SKILLS FOR INDUSTRY

Watching him in his element is nothing short of inspiring – he is currently doing some work with precision assembly, and excitedly showed us his progress.

It's obvious why Competenz arranged an interview for him the day they saw his Engineering drawings and projects, and why, when Ben showed us around the workshop, his colleagues had nothing but praise for him. He has a great attitude, a humble willingness to learn, and is appreciative of all the people who helped him get to where he is right now.

It seems a good attitude runs within the family. His father, who Ben managed to get a job in Compac Sorting Equipment, had to change career at a later age – but did so with humility and determination. He is now the Sub-Assembly Coordinator. Ben now has the privilege of working with his father, something he is both grateful for and proud of.

Of course, there have been some challenges. Ben had to learn to meet deadlines while working with tons of steel, and has to constantly challenge himself while learning new skills. He has hurt himself while welding. He once used the wrong grease. But these are the best learning experiences for him.

As a Got A Trade Hero, Ben wants to help other people, particularly young people, to be more aware of trades and different career pathways. The intelligent, once camera-shy young man is now comfortable in his role as a Got A Trade ambassador, and wants to give back.

While Ben took subjects in school that prepared him for studying Engineering in university, he chose an apprenticeship and did not look back.

“The trend from school is going to uni, it was just the norm... Nobody ever considered an apprenticeship.”

But Ben veered off the traditional pathway, and his risk certainly paid off!

The advantages over going straight into university? No student debts, some money in the bank, valuable hands-on practical experience that can't be taught by a book. There is theory, Ben explains, but practical experience is something best learnt in real life.

“You've dealt with the metal. You've touched it. You've worked with it... There are formulas in university that tell you the hardness of the metal... but having done an apprenticeship, you've actually dealt with it, you know titanium is hard... You can put your experience into the formulas. You know titanium is hard for a fact, not just because the numbers tell you.”

The decision to do an apprentice was win-win; Ben can learn practical skills while earning money. It also cemented his love for mechanical engineering, and rather than changing courses halfway through like some of his peers, Ben has discovered an industry he could be in for the rest of his life. For him, an apprenticeship has set him up for life. Earning while learning meant that Ben, if he wanted, could get into university with real life experience, skills and money.

His key piece of advice? “Take every opportunity!”

In fact, he could not stress it more. Ben took every opportunity given to him, and had a grateful attitude for each one. His apprenticeship has already taken him to South Carolina, and his qualifications with Compac Sorting Equipment can get him around the world. His next goal? Whipping up the car parts for the Holden he dreams of owning one day!

After all, as Ben said, “there is nothing holding you back!”

This article was written by a Maverick from TEARAWAY, The Voice of New Zealand Youth! <http://tearaway.co.nz/>

