

# Doing the Right Thing

## Professionalism

*By Chris Compton, Founder and CEO of HVACRedu.net*

Ya know I've been messing around in this industry for a pretty good while. I went to a private trade school in Yakima, Washington called JM Perry Trade. It was one of the best programs around 30 years ago and still is today. They are still running a hard core HVACR technical program that goes 2 years straight (2784 Hours). The school is a "dot.org" that was begun through the philanthropy of a fruit baron's wife in his honor. It was called Perry Trade when I was there and now referred to as Perry Technical Institute. I haven't been back since 1981 when I graduated but still get their alumni letters. If you want to check them out click on the link: [Perry Technical Institute](#). I'm going to drop in on them one of these days and say thank you. It's been a real whirl since I left there, all of it good.

Over the years I have come to realize that there are not many schools that hard core in our industry, none that provide that many hours of straight industry stuff that I'm aware of. I graduated from there in September of 1981 after beginning the program in October of 1979...actually I was out of school in April of 81 because I had a good job as a technician and was only required to check in once a week and hand in my home work. Two of us finished at the top of the class with the same GPA and performance rating. I'm thankful that I access to such a good education. What made it good for me was I found out that this stuff turned my crank and I had a passion to know everything that I could about it. Hmmm, I'm still trying but 30 years later I don't think I'll ever get there.

Fortunately for me the things that were taught and drilled by the instructors were the basic and fundamental principles of the technology; electron flow, fluid physics, thermo dynamics, mechanical concepts, etc. The other great benefit was the labs. We were taught maintenance and service tasks by the book and then well exercised in the lab activities. At the time I assumed that that was what you needed to know to be successful as a technician and everyone did. Silly me.

I discovered when I went to work for a service company that I was just starting to learn the trade and ended up doing a lot of review and study of what I had already learned. That continues. After working the street for 4 years as a tech I tried my hand at contracting (yes I have the dreaded Entrepreneurial disease) for the next 10 years. We did pretty well at contracting and ended up with a 20 man crew mostly doing residential, commercial and industrial service work with a couple of install crews working and a sheet metal shop. While messing around being a contractor I found out how to be a business man..it was either that or die a bankrupt death. There were a few times that seemed possible.

We decided to go home back to the Ranch in Montana so we sold out and moved home. I thought that I would just open up a shop but on the way through Coeur d'Alene, Idaho I got hired to teach the HVACR program at North Idaho College. Some day maybe I'll talk about a 160 commute every day for 179 contract days over 18 years. Good thing I have a passion for this stuff. My school teacher thing taught me more lessons than I taught my students.

Since you who are reading my dribble might be one of my students I intend to share some observations with you about this industry; HVACR. The education side of the industry hasn't changed much in 30 years. I was lucky to have 2 years of GI bill left and then fall into Perry Trade looking for a career. That isn't necessarily the case for many then and still today. I run into many techs that have been OJT since day one without an educational foundation in the trade. The folks they are working for don't have any either. The blind leading the blind BUT they are making a living at it.

In today's complex technology of HVACR basic fundamental knowledge and skills are critical to your success and the success of an entire nation that depends on your skills. HVACR figures HUGE in the national energy scene not to mention all of the people that expect to be comfortable in their home, office, or any other place that is indoors and requires conditioning. The national food supply is another small issue that we are in charge of after it has been harvested or processed. And then there are all of the other things that HVACR supports and without it would not be happening. I usually challenge people to tell me something that hasn't been touched by HVACR in the market place.

As a technician I used to call myself the best hated man in town...nobody wanted to call me but everybody did. I knew that I was VERY important to my customers and that they trusted me explicitly to *do the right thing* when it came to their products or comfort. Some might not want that kind of trust and the responsibility that comes with it but I enjoyed it as a tech, a contractor and continue to do so as an educator. It is good for the ego and boosts your confidence right up there but It does come with a *price*.

The *price* is to know what you are doing and then doing what you say you are going to do, i.e. "*Doing the Right Thing*". That is my definition of a *professional* and it fits just about anywhere, even in the HVACR industry. My experience as well as the experience of thousands of others in the trade shows this to be a true statement over and over again. Unfortunately that wasn't the norm back when and still isn't today. In my opinion our industry deserves the butt crack persona that we enjoy...don't ask me how many butt crack cartoons have been sent to me.

Being around the block so many times I have formed an opinion about the HVACR workforce. I think that most of us are good and hard working folks making a living for ourselves and families following a career that we have chosen or is it just a job? I chose the career word for me which means that I've been trying to "*Do the Right Thing*" for a long time and continue to push my personal envelope of *professionalism*. If it's just a job for you then you are probably at the end of your *professional* growth and should not bother reading any more of my dribble.

If you are into a career that doesn't have any limits, doesn't need a 4 year degree, does need a good foundation of knowledge, does need skilled and educated hands, does have a scope of work that never stops, has more openings and opportunities for *professionals* than anything else I know of and can be found needed anywhere in the world then you are in the right place, congratulations.

Myself and my crew have developed an online program called HVACRedu.net which is also providing the ItsAboutQ.net program in Southern California. We are *doing the right thing* for the industry we serve by providing that which is badly needed in a format and delivery method that provides high level and

asynchronous access to the knowledge and skill development necessary to *Do the Right Thing*. If you aspire to be a *professional* the first thing that you should realize is that you are a *valuable person* doing very *valuable work*.

With ongoing experience and a reasonable continuous effort to improve your status the limit is unknown. Don't bitch at me about your wages or maybe the tightwad that you work for. If you are worth more than you are getting that becomes obvious very quickly and either your employer will bump you up or someone will make you an offer you can't refuse. I've seen many a *professional* move up because their skills and abilities become known in the industry circles that we all travel in. If you are in the game, ultimately you will develop a reputation that is hard to hide and the opportunities start showing up. My comments are intended to be encouragement, press on, be a professional, you won't be sad!