

**BEST PRACTICE – WHAT IS IT AND HOW DOES IT APPLY TO THE
SUBCONTRACT TURNING INDUSTRY?**

Best Practice has no doubt been with us since the days of the Pharaohs, and certainly the Romans must have used best practices to organise their empire and to build the many edifices and structures that remain from their times until today. However, perhaps those of us who were taught by grandfather and the apprentice masters of old, will well remember how they encouraged, taught and even beat us into doing the job, not any old way, but the right way, which in those days was considered to be that time's best practice. And how many times did we have to do it, over and over again, until we got it just right, just as we had been shown?

David McIlwain who is MD at our Hastings, Technoturn factory taught best practice of his time, and was apprentice master to most of our younger generation, now in their late 30's and early 40's at Rugby. They still look on him as their guide and mentor and value the lessons that he taught them. Even today they talk about their time under his tutelage and appreciate the influence he has had on their development and careers. He is a natural teacher and continues this work by leading our team at Technoturn. Age has mellowed him somewhat, but he is still a hard, but fair taskmaster nonetheless!!

Until the difficult times of the early 1980's when apprenticeships, as were traditionally practised, were discontinued by many large companies to save money and the advent of modern multi axis CNC machinery becoming available to subcontractors blurring the edges of capability between traditional turning, milling and grinding machines and enabling machinery to be multi tasked in these disciplines, the principle of best utilisation of this type of expensive equipment became very apparent.

Some tried to adapt the new machinery to traditional ways of operating whilst other, smarter people, thought outside the box and found quicker, cheaper, and better ways of producing, new and traditional components by using the modern technology to its best advantage. In fact anyone with any sense did their very best to find ways of making even the most complicated components in one operation. And here we come back to best practice.

Adopting best practise principles involves change, not only in our thinking but also in manufacturing processes we adopt. The courage to adopt change has to come from the top and affects everyone in the organisation. The resistance to change usually comes from those, even some at the top, who live in their own comfort bubble and those who fear the unknown or from those who are just unaware of the changes, or the need for the changes taking place around them.

Best practice is fundamental to our business and we have a saying in the Techno Group that “If the spindles aren’t turning we’re not earning” We only add value to our business by machining good product, right first time, delivered on time, as efficiently and competitively as possible and utilising the knowledge, skills and expertise of our setters and machinists to achieve the best possible setting and cycle times and using the best possible production processes.

To do this we encourage our best people to devise the best way of manufacturing any particular component, identifying machine, tooling and processing method. This then becomes our standard operating procedure (SOP) and that is the method to be used until we find an even better way of manufacture. Learning and knowledge transfer is a dynamic process, which cannot stand still. We all learn new things every day and discover new materials and ways of machining them, together with new and better tooling and processes and our job as managers is to encourage all our workforce to have that desire to learn and move forward with the times.

Many years ago British Telecom ran an advert advocating use of the then new email system, “Work Smarter not Harder”. That slogan still rings true today and probably encapsulates the spirit of BEST PRACTICE.