



YOUR WASTE COULD BE TREASURE TO SCHOOLS

Gervais Sawyer says schools are crying out for wood materials



Just occasionally, my wife asks me “Shouldn’t we move to the countryside Gervais and downsize?” to which I reply “Leave my workshop? No chance”.

You see, I have always had that urge to make things. It probably started with my Dad who had a total ‘can do’ attitude to life, but was then fuelled by toys like Meccano and the amazing Brickplayer. (I still have both).

Over the years I have evolved a well-equipped workshop where I can take on most things in wood and metal. When I look around my house I can hardly believe that I have made so many things. Furniture, joinery, kitchen units, toys and so on, and not just for myself but for friends and clients too.

Back when I was at school we were assigned workshop tasks to develop manual skills that included needlework and, of course, woodwork. Some of those projects have survived to this day, partly because we were given really good materials with which to work and guided into executing good designs. The results were items that we were proud to take home. I was hooked and have observed over the years that the satisfaction of creating things is in everybody. Success in those early projects is vital.

Fast forward now to where I go out to schools careers fairs to try and interest young people in the wood related industries. We are Britain’s fifth or sixth biggest economic activity and yet are totally invisible to teachers and children alike. I enjoy getting them to imagine waking up to a world with no wood in it. “You are sleeping on the concrete as there is no bed, floor or roof. Toddle out to the loo – a bit embarrassing as there is no door or toilet paper”. You can see that I know how to get a response, EUGHH!

My most recent careers fair was to a mixed grammar school in a middle class district and it was a joy because the students were really engaged. Polite, interested, eye contact and asked lots of questions. Fine, until I spoke to the design-technology teaching staff. They soldier on with limited resources to the extent that the only materials they can afford are MDF offcuts and old pallets. Now I salute them if it teaches them how to pull out a ring-shank nail (ever tried? Impossible!) but they are hardly going to be able to make anything they can be proud to take home. This is a tragedy.

Now I do know of timber companies who supply to schools and colleges good materials that to them are just offcuts and waste but to the schools are just like gold dust. Could you open a channel of communication to your local school? After all, they may supply your future employees.

Gervais Sawyer is a wood consultant and a member of the Wood Technology Society

The trade has always grumbled about the difficulty in recruiting, but it seems to me that several barriers need to be overcome. Are you visible? (Sorry, I have said that in a previous column.) Support with materials and advice and perhaps works visits? Can you offer a career structure?

Careers Fairs happen at schools all over the country and it will cost you nothing to attend and promote your company. I can assure you that you will enjoy the experience. ■



Above: Gervais Sawyer goes out to schools careers fairs to try and interest young people in the wood related industries

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