

## Making a Difference in the Engineering World

SETA has been creating, developing and supporting incredible engineers for over 50 years and we're immensely proud of that heritage.

Let's meet one of our former apprentices...



### Andy Tomlin

Product Manager – Team Leader at GEA, a global company providing engineering equipment for the pharmaceutical industry

An apprentice at SETA in 1994/95

Employer at the time: GEA (named Niro Fielder at the time)

### Tell us more about what you do at GEA

The Product Manager- Team Leader role is relatively new to GEA Eastleigh. On a day-to-day basis, I'm responsible for the design and functionality of technical equipment, and supporting our Sales Team with enquiries where I make sure that what we offer our customers is technically appropriate for their application (e.g. pharmaceutical companies making tablets).

### Why did you choose the apprenticeship route?

I've always loved Formula 1 racing but I realised that I would probably never be a world championship-winning driver! The engineering that went into creating an elite car fascinated me and I realised I could perhaps be involved with the design of the cars which led me to engineering.

During the work experience placements at school, there was an opportunity to go to a local engineering company, Niro Fielder, where I felt it would provide me with an insight into this kind of career path. I loved the placement! It was only two weeks but it felt special in terms of the work, the people and the friendships I formed. In fact, the person who was my mentor at the time is still a good friend.

Following the placement, I kept in touch with the Engineering Manager who offered me holiday work during the subsequent summer. This eventually led to an offer of an apprenticeship and I did my training at SETA.

## Making a Difference in the Engineering World

### **What were your most memorable or standout moments at SETA?**

Being taught the basic engineering techniques and having the hands on experience of manufacturing various items, which ultimately led to designing and building the end of year project. By the end of my time at SETA I was making things I never thought I would be able to. My year-end project was creating a tape-laying machine, which isn't as boring as it sounds as it's a really useful bit of equipment! (I made that with Mike Driscoll!).

I also remember having to travel to SETA on a 50cc motorbike in all weathers (I was too young to drive and that's all I could buy at that age). It was quite an experience – one day the chain broke and I had to push my bike for a few miles to get home...it was character-building!

### **What did you do when you completed your apprenticeship i.e. what was your route to your current position?**

I completed my apprenticeship in 1998 having achieved the ONC and the HNC in Mechanical Engineering at Southampton City College (in my day, we would have day release which meant four days at SETA and one day in college). Because I did well in those qualifications I was able to skip the foundation year of a degree in Mechanical Engineering which I completed in 2000. I was still working at GEA throughout my studies and have progressed through multiple roles in the company, starting as a Mechanical Design Engineer, moving on to a Project Controller, a Technical Product Manager and my current role. I'm sure there have been some other roles in amongst those too.

Because the company has invested in me, I feel very loyal to GEA and want to give back to them. I enjoy working here and it's always worked for me in terms of work/life balance. I've been able to grow professionally in a way that suits me personally.

### **Tell us about a challenge you have faced at work and how you overcame it**

Visiting a strategic overseas customer alone who was very demanding where there was an issue with the equipment we had supplied them. I had to determine the root cause and resolve - this was overcome by methodically analysing the problem with remote support from my team. As engineers, we are often in situations where you need to think on your feet and find solutions.

### **What have been your greatest successes?**

- I'm very proud of gaining a 1st Class Honours Degree.
- I am now recognised as an Incorporated Engineer (IEng), which is an internationally recognised level of professional registration for engineers. I was keen to put in the hard work to achieve registration because I realised I wanted to give myself some recognition of what I had achieved in my career. If my career path and achievements hadn't been what they were, I wouldn't have been able to achieve IEng.
- Promotion to the Team Leader role at GEA.

## Making a Difference in the Engineering World

### **What advice would you give to anyone trying to find their path to a great career?**

I believe that an apprenticeship is the best possible springboard for an engineering career as the skills, knowledge, techniques and experience that you get from an apprenticeship can be used throughout your career. Don't wish away your apprenticeship, grasp each moment and take as much as you can. Keep pushing to acquire knowledge and never stop learning - success and progression will come.

### **Anything else?**

I've recently become a STEM Ambassador which gives me the opportunity to inspire children and young people about engineering. It's important to me because I have got to the point in my career where it's the right time to give something back. I want to give guidance to young people who might want to go down a similar path.