

LIVING OUR VALUES EVERYDAY | TEAMWORK

Pole Plant Mentors Provided Necessary Support to New Employees

August's Living Our Values section featured an article on the Pole Plant Mentorship program. It focused heavily on the program's implementation without much discussion of the mentors who work to make it successful. So, for this issue, I sat down with the mentors: Travis Davis, Blake Ellis, Carla Gaylor, and Antonio Pickens. Third Shift Supervisor and Mentorship Program Creator Jessie Ashley selected the four mentors based on their attitude, performance, openness, and initiative. In this article, I talked with two new employees who benefited from the mentorship program: Carl Bostic and Sir Edwards. We discussed the details of the program and the significance of the mentor/mentee experience.

I began our conversation by sharing the following quote, "A great mentor is an advisor, role model, guide, and colleague." I then asked the mentors to tell me about the most important mentors in their lives.

Gaylor: "A good mentor is confident and outspoken. My mother taught me to be these things and to care about how others feel."

Ellis: "My parents were my mentors. They taught me that you must work for what you want, which I try to do every day when I come to work. I try to coach new employees like I would want to be coached. I want them to know they are wanted here and help them do the best job they can."

Davis: "An old friend of mine used to say, 'If it is not worth doing right, then it is not worth doing at all.' I try to show new employees the importance of taking pride in their work."

Pickens: "My mother was my mentor because she showed me a good work ethic and how to care for and respect others. I want new employees to feel comfortable around me so that they will talk to me. I tell them they can ask me anything. There are no stupid questions."

My next question was, "Why did you agree to participate in the program?"

Gaylor: "I like trying new things and being involved because I get to meet new people, so it sounded good to me." On a side note, before meeting Gaylor, a Team ERMCO employee told me she has always been a protector and an outspoken voice for those who cannot find their voices. In high school,

she confronted bullies and protected the bullied, a very admirable trait that made me like her before I even met her.

Ellis: "I just wanted to branch out. It has allowed me to learn about myself and the different jobs at the pole plant. It has also allowed me to meet new people and help them find success at ERMCO."

Davis: "I want to work with people who are just as proud of doing a good job as I am, and if I can project that feeling of pride onto someone else, that's what I'm in it for."

Pickens: "Because I had a terrible experience when I started at ERMCO. I felt things would've been better if I'd had someone there to help me, so I want to be that person for new employees."

Ashley's priorities for the program are to teach the new hires practical knowledge, shrewdness, and the importance of ownership, teamwork, quality, and service. From our conversation, I learned that the mentors do much more than share practical job knowledge. They provide psychological support during the mentees' 90-day learning journey. They use their knowledge and experience to help the mentees cope by helping them:

- Process an abundance of new information,
- Gain confidence on the job and in work relationships,
- Stick it out through challenges and manage stress,
- Determine the best strategies to improve their performance and become contributing members of Team ERMCO.

When asked about their individual priorities the mentors all want new employees to be comfortable in their work and in communicating with all levels of team members at ERMCO.

Gaylor: "Training, communication, safety, and comfort are my main priorities. I want the new employees to feel comfortable doing their jobs and ensure they are properly trained to do their jobs safely. I want them to feel comfortable coming to me about anything, and I want them to be committed to coming to work on time every day. I try to teach them the rules that have made me successful at ERMCO so they can be successful too."

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Mentor Blake Ellis, left, working with a new employees Theo Clark and Payton Glean.



Mentor Carla Gaylor, middle, checks on new employee Ashley Clevenger in QA Testing.



Mentor Antonio Perkins, left, converses with new employee Brad Sexton in Winding.



Mentor Travis Davis, right, checks on new employee in Welding.

Ellis: "My top priorities are to ensure they are trained properly and comfortable doing their jobs and talking to their coworkers and supervisors. I emphasize the importance of doing each job correctly and making quality products. I also like to know what they plan to get from ERMCO and what they think the future holds for them."

Davis: "Effective communication is my top priority. It is the key to a new employee's success. As a new hire, you do not know what you can and cannot do or how you are supposed to act. There are a lot of expectations placed on them, which is overwhelming. I try to alleviate some of that anxiety by helping them communicate with their coworkers, leads, or HR. I want to make them comfortable in their departments and feel valued as members of Team ERMCO."

Pickens: "My priorities are to make sure that the new employees are properly trained and understand the chain of command. They need to know who to go for what and not be afraid to do so. I also like to find out what their goals are for the future. Do they want to branch out to another department? Are they interested in becoming a lead?"

Relationship building is the key to establishing a successful mentor-mentee partnership, so it is important that the mentors are good role models who can easily establish trust and rapport with others. To excel in the mentor-mentee partnership, the mentors share their goals and vision for success with the mentees. They agree on expectations, including how often they will meet (twice a week), the length of the relationship (90-days), confidentially, and other items. The mentors also pay close attention to the quality of their mentoring relationship, often asking the mentees if they are interacting enough, their views on the help they are providing, and how things could be improved. How the mentors begin their relationships with the mentees sets the tone for the relationship's success, so I asked the mentors to describe their initial interactions with their mentees.

Gaylor: "I smile and introduce myself, and they just open up. I can tell they feel comfortable and that I have their back."

Ellis: "I introduce myself and try to establish common ground. I ask about their previous job and how ERMCO compares. I ask if they felt they had proper training and if they are comfortable doing the job. We go from there."

Davis: "I try to find out what their

insecurities are at ERMCO. What are they afraid to do? Are they scared to talk to someone? Is someone being unsympathetic or pushing them to do things the wrong way or do things they have not been trained to do?"

Pickens: "I introduce myself and try to learn a little about them, including their past work history. I try to establish a rapport with them, so they trust me."

The Pole Plant Mentorship Program which began in March has been very successful. Retention has improved and employee engagement and communication in the plant is much better. "I'm proud of these mentors, and I'm proud to be part of this program," said Ashley. "The goal is to ensure that everyone is trained properly and enjoys their job."

The mentors agree that essential things like communication, engagement, teamwork, and ownership are improving at the pole plant.

Davis: "Attitudes have improved, and people feel a little more welcome here. I feel boosted up because other employees notice what we are doing. Instead of them thinking, 'It's a new person that I've got to train,' they see us working with them, and it takes a little stress off them. We bridge the gap between the long-term employees and the new hires. We try to make them comfortable with each other."

FA Pole Employee Carl Bostic has been with Team ERMCO for six months and is one of Gaylor's first 'graduates' of the program.

Bostic: "The program helped me with communication. I had only met my supervisor once before she called me to the office. I was nervous and worried that I was in trouble, but I did not know why. Carla made me feel comfortable talking to my supervisor; since then, we have had several good conversations. I feel much more at ease."

When we asked the mentors to share success stories, Gaylor immediately referred to Bostic and FA Pole employee Sir Edwards who also participated in the program. Edwards, like Bostic, has been employed for six months and was among Gaylor's first mentees.

Bostic: "She would stop and ask questions about the job. She was trying to figure out what we were doing, how we were doing, and if we were comfortable with the people

we work around. She asked if there was anything she could do to improve what we were doing, and I told her it was hot. The next day a fan appeared. I do not know if she had anything to do with it, but I was grateful."

Edwards: "When an issue comes up, it is nice to have someone to voice it to, or if I do not understand something or do not know who to go to with an issue, it is good to have her there to help. She makes us comfortable."

Ellis has mentored six employees, who are all still employed at ERMCO.

Ellis: "All of my mentees are still working at ERMCO. I like the fact that even with the very first person I trained, if we walk past each other we speak. It is good to have that relationship with your coworkers, and that wouldn't happen without this program."

Davis told us about a new hire whose wife was expecting their first baby. He was worried that he would not be able to take off for the momentous event because he was a new employee. Travis coordinated with HR, and the employee witnessed the birth of his child without being reprimanded at work. The employee was excited that ERMCO allowed him the time off, considering he was in his first 90-days of employment.

Pickens also enjoys the friendships he has made through the program and considers those his success stories.

Pickens: "Yesterday, I had two people who had completed the program stop and speak to me. I did not think they would remember who I was, but they did. That made me feel good," said Pickens.

As far as future plans for the Pole Mentorship Program, Ashley said, "We are going to make this program a success so that all new employees adapt easily to our ERMCO culture. I want to add more mentors by recruiting employees who completed the mentorship program themselves."

- With the establishment of the new training center, similar mentorship programs are on the horizon for the pad and three phase plants. Pad Plant Manager Brad Turnbo said they are looking for mentors who positively represent ERMCO's values daily. The program will build off the foundation established by Ashley. "Jessie was instrumental in getting this ball rolling and making the program successful. It was his vision and his creation," said Turnbo.