



Industry Trailblazer: Teaching ‘Turns My Crank’

The incomparable Ron Slee steps into his next chapter. Thanks for everything, Ron!

BY KIM PHELAN

If you’ve ever been lucky enough to meet

Ron Slee or sit in on one of his classes or webinars, you already know he’s more than one of your run-of-the-mill smart guys. Besides having done the hands-on, hard work of the industry’s product support jobs – as well as pioneering work in “data processing” – for big-line OEM dealers like Cat and Volvo, Ron consumes books and news journals like glasses of water (or make that Scotch) and starts to lose his grip when he’s not in the company of industry colleagues and dealer managers who “keep it real” for him.

But in addition to being one of the construction equipment industry’s most experienced and well-liked product support trainers and consultants, Ron is remarkably, even deviously, ingenious – and apparently always has been. He tells an anecdote from his youth that he got a job playing piano in a Canadian nightclub, underage in his late teens, so he could hang around college girls in a bar and not get arrested.

Ron’s a teacher at heart, and AED has benefited from his talent since the mid-’90s when began writing for *CED* magazine, and later teaching seminars at AED annual meetings. He became a *CED* columnist around 1998 and has been one of the association’s most prolific webinar and self-study creators. He joined AED in 1994 when AED’s then-president, Jay Paradis (Brandeis Machinery), “guilted” him into it because it was the industry from which Ron was making his living.

This issue of *CED* magazine features Ron’s last contribution as a regular columnist, and 2015 will be the first in many years that AED won’t be offering his webinars and live classes. But not to worry, the practical parts and service best practices he teaches will still be available. Ron has launched a new online training business, “**Learning Without Scars**” (learningwithoutscars.com), where manufacturers and dealers can continue accessing the same level of industry content – applicable for “all the leading OEM brands and their dealers” – for which he is renowned.

What’s With That Scars Stuff?

Ron says that early in his career, so much of what he was

doing was pushing the envelope before anyone else was thinking about things like automation, data collection, flat rating, barcoding and more. He feels like he took the arrows and scars on his back and likes to think of this new web-based learning resource as an ironic twist to all that he helped develop 45 years ago – and that the managers he trains today are in a safe zone for growing as product support leaders.

More Innovation to Come

The new chapter in Ron’s career includes eight “live” classes in 2015, 80 new webinars, and 14 new self-study courses that will eventually be translated in 10 different languages by 2016. He’s also developing a new “financial fitness” program for dealers, where executives can submit confidential data and have it evaluated in a graphic score – red light for “stop what you’re doing;” yellow light for “be careful;” and green light for the old “atta boy gold star.” Dealers will be able to choose from more than 200 measures and receive their selected evaluations at whatever frequency they want, be it quarterly, semiannually, etc. Not surprising (to this editor, anyways,) Ron also has a new 21-book series he’s gearing up to produce: “Things I Learned in the Dirt.”

How Does He Do It?

That’s easy: Ron’s daughter, Caroline Slee, is now a partner in the family business and she’s selling Learning Without Scars like gangbusters. She’s a teacher and writer, like her father (but has the good looks of mother Marlene); she also has untenable drive and perseverance – the 38-year-old is a cancer-survivor who recently did a 6K, 2,000-foot elevation climb with her kids.

Ron says what he’s most proud of, to date, is having achieved his potential.

“I think the other thing that I’m extremely pleased with is how many people in the industry I’ve touched,” he said. “There’s thousands and thousands of people that I have touched through classes, through conventions – and taught something. I’ve seen the lights go on in people’s eyes and that really turns my crank.” ■