Jonathan Grocott: The Future of Boeing's Composite Skins

Jonathan Grocott clearly has the education and hard skills needed to excel in his position as a numerical control programming engineer at The Boeing Company, but he also shares a personality trait possessed by many other truly successful people—humility.

Douglas C. Genord, Jonathan’s colleague, mentor and technical fellow for Boeing Information Technology in Tukwila, WA, describes Grocott as exceeding everyone’s expectations, being extremely capable, demonstrating leadership skills and sitting at the top of the talent pool.

But ask Jonathan, 27, why he’s so successful, and at first he talks about others—his great colleagues and mentors. “I do work hard,” he said, adding: “And it’s something I want: to be successful.”

Jonathan said he also watched how his dad ran the family construction business and adopted the elder Grocott’s work ethic—seeing things through to completion, being fully engaged in processes, communicating with others, and encouraging everyone to work toward the same goal.

The goal for the project team Jonathan was on with Genord was to develop a best-in-industry composite wing skin fabrication system for the Boeing 787 Dreamliner. This involved research, development, implementation and production hardening of software, hardware and the corresponding processes, Genord explained.

Jonathan, who’s keenly interested in robotics and automation, said he considered himself blessed “to get on such a technically challenging project very early on.” He obviously exceeded the challenge.

“Jonathan has already left such a large impact on high volume composite part lamination,” Genord wrote. “He has directly impacted the design, functionality and efficiency of both the hardware and software used to apply composite tape which have and will enable Boeing to increase 787 production rates.”

Jonathan joined Boeing in 2011 after earning a bachelor’s of science degree in manufacturing engineering technology at Western Washington University (Bellingham, WA). Boeing is only his second full-time position, not counting framing houses for his father’s construction business, but he’s already considered a pro.

“Without knowing Jonathan’s background of recently coming out of school you would have thought he had been in industry for at least 10 years,” Genord wrote in his nomination.

Jonathan provided numerical control programming support to the team, including drafting implementation plans for improvements in production. That’s where his leadership skills really shone. “He quickly brainstorms and itemizes tasks to be performed, contacts the impacted team members and subject matter experts for input and concurrence, and works with the project manager to capture the details into a formal project plan,” Genord said.

Working at Boeing seems a natural choice for Jonathan. He grew up in Washington, and his school tailors its engineering program for Boeing jobs.

“Manufacturing engineering really has the most diverse opportunities,” he said. “Everything has to be made, everything has to be manufactured, so you have a lot of options.” ME