



Mark Hickman

Transportation Instructor
Dakota County Technical College

Mark Hickman teaches in Dakota County Technical College's General Motors Automotive Service Education Program, which is the only one of its kind in Minnesota. His years of industry experience, 20 years of teaching experience, consistent record of professional development and the relationships he maintains with professionals make for a truly one-of-a-kind learning experience for his students.

Hickman got his start in auto mechanics as a student at Minneapolis Community and Technical College. After graduating, he worked as an auto mechanic for 10 years before getting a bachelor's degree from the University of Minnesota. Even then, he was gaining experience as an educator. He had started teaching automotive courses at Dakota County while enrolled in his bachelor's program.

Hickman has continued to learn and develop himself as a professional in his field and as an instructor. While teaching at Dakota, he earned a master's of public and nonprofit administration from Metropolitan State University. He always has sought training opportunities that would keep him current in the automotive field as well. In 2006, he attained GM World Class Technician status. At the time, he was the 33rd GM ASEP instructor in the world to have achieved this recognition.

Hickman has a strong sense of duty to his students. In addition to the training he provides them in the classroom, he cares for their development post-graduation. Through his industry experience he is able to maintain strong relationships with employers who can hire his students after they leave Dakota County Technical College. In his teaching portfolio, Hickman notes that he frequently drops by dealerships and service centers in an attempt to secure future places of employment for his students. In 2009, he personally visited more than 100 potential internship worksites across Minnesota.

To ensure their post-graduation success with these employers, Hickman integrates his course materials with exercises on how to work in a professional environment. His unique "crash course in working in a professional environment" exemplifies his attention to student success in a highly competitive marketplace, where professionalism can make a graduate stand out among others in search of limited jobs.

Finally, as a service to his community and to further his students' training, Hickman manages service-learning projects in conjunction with his automotive courses. A standout example is the "Blue Knights for Red Bulls" project, wherein his students repair cars for the benefit of returning vets. In the true

spirit of service learning, this project does tangible good for returning veterans while giving his students real-world, hands-on experience in the field.

A student review committee member said of Hickman, “While some resist the view, I liked his quote that he considers his students customers who can take their business elsewhere.” This statement gets at the root of what makes Hickman an Educator of the Year. He recognizes a duty to students, and ensures that together they make mutual contributions to their future success.

REVIEWER COMMENTS

“I was really impressed with how he teaches his students,” said one reviewer. “He has figured out a way to get people who admittedly do not read books or take notes to do it.” His students (18- to 25-year-old males who, Hickman says, never read books for pleasure) are encouraged to learn to take notes because they are allowed to use notes in tests. That allows him to write more complex tests—not just Scantron multiple-choice exams. His creativity comes through in his teaching methods—using a garden hose in class to demonstrate electrical flow, for example. One classroom management example was memorable. He tells his students in the first class session: “Take out your cell phones.” Instead of telling them to turn them off, he instructs them to store his phone number. One student reviewer noted that he’s never experienced an instructor who did that.

Hickman’s portfolio describes how he has evolved as a teacher, and how he thinks about his own learning and about how his students learn. Hickman shows a constant feedback process—for himself and for his students. He uses peer consultation and student-group-instructional-feedback techniques to get his colleagues to talk with his students about how he can improve his teaching and their learning. “His professional growth and ongoing learning is amazing; in this regard, his portfolio is a standout over any that I read,” said a reviewer.

Service learning projects are not yet typical in technical programs, and Hickman’s efforts are impressive. He’s very engaged in the college—for example, taking an active role in accreditation review. He is also active in his union, serving as vice chair. In addition, he and a colleague have been doing voluntary summer workshops for instructors from a former GM site. Modeling service, he encourages students to be service-oriented, and that’s appropriate in a field like his.

In terms of assessment, Hickman’s rubrics are simple but effective. He improved on and adapted a national industry rubric to remove subjectivity and to improve its validity. He uses this revised rubric in his program. He uses the theoretical language of assessment in discussing, for example, formative and summative assessment, and shows that he really knows the difference in practice. As a result of his ongoing improvement efforts, his students’ test results on standardized, nationally benchmarked tests are consistently higher than the national average.