

Seniors go back to School

By: Tom Pedersen

At *Gjøvik Trevare* (a woodworking factory) senior employees have been offered the chance to gain formal qualifications *before* the younger ones. The reason for this is that the firm places older workers on an equal footing with the younger forces and looks upon them as facilitators, role models and culture carriers.

- We feel that it is only fair that older workers who are responsible for on-the-job training in the firm should be considered on equal terms with the younger ones who obtain craft certificates. It is the seniors that first and foremost train the new employees, and therefore it is natural to give them the opportunity to obtain a craft certificate themselves, says general manager Eva Skogstad to the firm's senior policy – a policy which cannot be described as either advanced or expansive.

- We place the seniors on an equal footing with everybody else in the firm, she says. The management of *Gjøvik Trevare* is convinced that this will pay off.

Culture Carriers

Gjøvik Trevare has existed since 1958 under different names. It manufactures windows and balcony doors and employs almost 100 people. The firm soon became aware of the importance of being an inclusive workplace, involving among other things the follow-up of absence and flexible working time arrangements. The firm finds several good arguments in favour of concentrating on seniors for skilled work.

- The oldest employees pass on the firm's culture. They also have a lot of influence regarding the training activity. That is why we need to concentrate on this area. It also gives a positive signal within the firm when our older workers choose to spend their spare time obtaining more qualifications for their jobs, Skogstad says.

Day-to-day Benefits

Henry Kristoffersen (59) has been working at *Gjøvik Trevare* for 20 years. Last year he was one of the 15 workers with long seniority in the firm who gained their craft certificates. He had doubts in advance as to whether to go for it but has no regrets now.

- We benefit from having special skills on a day-to-day basis. Among other things, we are better able to provide documentation on why things are the way they are, his comment is to his time back at school. The training has given Kristoffersen and his colleagues a more uniform and correct view upon what causes deviations in production.

- It has also given a slight increase in pay, although that was not the main reason I did it, he smiles. The training itself is paid for by the firm. Kristoffersen on his part has to give of his spare time.

- A craft certificate gives respect for the product, which in turn makes happy customers, Eva Skogstad adds. She feels it is especially important with a view to the export market that the firm has a number of skilled workers – including the seniors.

Both Skogstad and Kristoffersen point out that the attitude of the owners towards the firm carries a lot of weight as regards to focus on specialized training. Maximum profits at the shortest possible time, is in their point of view not the way forward.

- Some years ago we were taken over by a new owner. Since then our profits have increased and we have made many investments. The owner has invested money in the firm and has been a driving force in encouraging workers to take specialized training. Support

from the management is essential, and little support would have had a negative effect. It is long-term thinking to invest in skills rather than showing off abroad, they both emphasize.