

On the Path to Advancement

A JOURNEY BACK TO SCHOOL THROUGH APPRENTICESHIP

Every Thursday, Larteng Kong stays at work for an extra hour or two to attend the in-class portion of the Industrial Manufacturing Technician (IMT) apprenticeship offered at Hood Packaging's Minneapolis facility. It makes for a long day and means that he doesn't get to spend much time with his five-year old son on those days but, for Larteng, attending the IMT class is an investment in his future.

"I especially like the college credit part [of the IMT apprenticeship]," Larteng explains. He had been working toward an information technology degree at nearby Hennepin Technical College but had to withdraw to support his family after his son was born. Larteng wants to go back to school but juggling work, family, and school hadn't seemed possible until he heard about the IMT program.

When a union representative gave a presentation about the IMT at Hood Packaging, where Larteng works in logistics and warehousing, he was quick to volunteer. "It's an opportunity to learn and advance," Larteng says. He hopes that the IMT apprenticeship will put him on a path to additional credentials and help him become a supervisor eventually.

The 18-month IMT apprenticeship trains frontline manufacturing workers to set up, operate, monitor, and control production equipment. Apprentices learn to understand manufacturing as a business system that integrates multiple disciplines, processes, and stakeholders. That knowledge allows workers to efficiently and safely manage time and materials, which helps improve manufacturing processes and schedules.

Larteng's favorite new skills are—all of them! He enjoys learning to read blueprints, and much of what he's learned about six sigma lean manufacturing, OSHA safety regulations, and quality control principles is immediately applicable—"I use that [knowledge] every day," he explains. "We work with heavy machinery, so it was really good to learn all the safety stuff" that was covered early in the IMT program. Larteng found the small group communications class especially valuable. He explains:

I learned how to approach a person, motivate them to do better. Now, when I train a new guy on the floor, I try to lead by example. Show him how to do the job right. The class helped me understand how what you do affects your whole department and even the whole company.

The IMT apprenticeship is designed to support students who are working while they learn. Larteng appreciates that Hood gives apprentices paid time out of the work day to take the class; a meeting place at the plant, so he doesn't have to spend any time traveling to a nearby college; and the supports of his supervisor, who is taking the same classes as Larteng. The instructor "is so patient" and spends as much time as Larteng and his classmates need to understand the material.

There is some homework—four to six hours each week—but Larteng finds that by spreading the work over the entire week, he can get it done without difficulty. The IMT is "a great way to advance yourself," Larteng concludes. "I would definitely recommend it to anyone at the plant who asks me."

For more information on the IMT Apprenticeship, including resources for employers, workforce development organizations, unions, and apprentices, [visit IMTApprenticeship.org](https://www.imtapprenticeship.org).