



Almost Qualified Program – White Paper

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Summary

Dassault Falcon Jet Corp. (DFJ) continually seeks talent to supply its future technical manufacturing skillset needs. When an ample supply of skilled workers is not available, DFJ activates the *Almost Qualified Program* which identifies workers possessing basic lifestyle management skills which are adequate to support a successful career at DFJ. Having identified individuals possessing these basic skills, the *Almost Qualified Program* builds on this “core competency”; adding basic technical skills in this program which is designed to evaluate and enhance the student’s competencies; equipping them to enter the DFJ workforce at the Apprentice level. The *Almost Qualified Program* provides a path for individuals with no former aircraft experience to obtain highly rewarding careers at DFJ. Completion of the two-phased program guarantees the graduate a formal job interview but does not guarantee employment. Unlike standard college courses, the *Almost Qualified Program* is not run on a regularly scheduled (semester) basis. A separate contract is initiated between the college and DFJ, based on forecasted staffing needs. The *Almost Qualified Program* is based on the axiom, “Hire for attitude, then train for ability.”

Program Partnership

DFJ contracts the services of Pulaski Technical College, a local, 2-year Arkansas college to manage and deliver a 16 week, 78 classroom hour program which identifies, selects and prepares individuals to qualify for apprentice-level aerospace employment at DFJ, at no tuition-cost to the individual. The college advertises the classes, screens and selects applicants. Program applicants are selected by the college, based on applicant responses to a jointly predetermined rubric during the inquiry/application process. Top-scoring applicants are offered entry into the program.

The college provides all facilities, classrooms, tools and adjunct instructors within the contract. DFJ pays a one-time contract fee for the “package”. There is no requirement for the college to provide a certain number of acceptable graduates to DFJ. DFJ guarantees an employment interview to each program graduate but does not guarantee a job offer. Due to the nature of the aerospace materials required to support the hands-on training experiences, DFJ also provides the “raw materials” either from scrap, off-fall, or new materials inventories – absorbing these costs as part of the recruitment budget. Academic instructors are drawn from the college’s resources. Technical and “observer” adjuncts used in the program are DFJ manager/supervisor level dayshift employees who are recommended by DFJ upper management to work under direct contract with the college; serving as evening adjunct instructors. These adjunct instructors grade



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student performance based on criteria defined by DFJ; and used to substantiate recommendations to DFJ for hire.

Training and Vetting

The 78 hours of training is preceded by a two-week marketing and selection process, beginning with ads in the local paper and on social media. The ad offers entry-level training to those interested in a career in aerospace manufacturing and a phone number to call at the college. Applicants calling the college are interviewed, using a multi-point rubric (Excel: Initial call log w Ranking), evaluating communication skills, related work experiences, and motivation. Based on these results, approximately 50 candidates are provided the opportunity to enroll in Phase One of the program.

Phase One is a 6-week, 1.5 hour, two nights per week segment during which the students are taught skills such as reading for information, English composition, basic math and measurement, teamwork and interviewing skills. Student performance is measured academically via their homework and assessment results, instructor's comments and observations. The college also places an adjunct observer in the class, who is a day-shift frontline DFJ supervisor. This observer tracks each student's lifestyle management skills using a checklist (see Excel Observations weeks 1-6) containing behavior traits such as alertness, early to class, homework complete, attention to detail, sits in the front and is actively engaged, social skills, peer interaction and team spirit. Students are advised the first day of class that each will participate in a random drug-screening and that failure immediately disqualifies the student. At week five, each student is provided a 15 minute "practice" job interview with a member of DFJ management, from the hiring department. These results are also managed by a predetermined rubric and a part of each student's evaluation process. A certificate is given to each graduate of Phase One in a short ceremony at the last class of the phase. Students are allowed excusable absences based on criteria similar to the DFJ work environment. Normally about 35 of the starting 50 students remain at week six and are given a certificate indicating successful completion of Phase One. About 10% of students become discouraged with their academic performance and drop the program. Another 10% drop out because they realize that they will not be able to pass a drug screening. Occasionally, students are notified that they are being dropped from the course due to various forms of unacceptable performance.

A non-class week is inserted between Phase One and Phase Two. This week is used by DFJ to review all of the student performance indicators acquired during Phase One and to select the best candidates to enter Phase Two. The number of students selected is capped by DFJ's needed manpower calculations combined with the number of apprentice positions that the shop believes they can effectively absorb during the ensuing months. DFJ conveys their selections to the college mid-week; allowing time for the college to notify the students that they have been selected (or not selected) to continue the following week into Phase Two.



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Phase Two runs for ten weeks, two nights per week, three hours per night. Phase Two is taught by DFJ frontline supervisors under adjunct contract with the college. While the primary focus of this phase is to teach entry-level shop skills, the students' soft skills are also being further evaluated. While instructors are teaching tools and techniques, they are also assessing students' attention to detail, ability to follow directions, pride in work and desire for perfection, willingness to present their errors and ask for help, keep a neat work area, help others and build team spirit. Assessment rubrics (see Excel: Academics and Mock Interviews) are also used in Phase Two.

Why Sixteen Weeks?

The length of this program was arbitrarily chosen, based on the recommendation of PTC, and their experience with students. It was assumed that a large percentage of program participants already had "day jobs" and 16 weeks was probably all that they could temporarily add to their existing lifestyles. Although the program is offered at no dollar cost to the student, clearly the participants must increase the complexity of their lives (increased obligations of travel, class and study time, childcare, added expenses ...) to participate in the program. It is conceivable that a shorter program might gain more applicants and a longer program would offer more training time. However, for now, 16 weeks seems to be working, so we are hesitant to change.

A corollary factor in the 16-week decision is the strong enticement of a potential job at DFJ. DFJ is known for highly competitive wages, exceptional benefits, and great working conditions. Probably, an organization offering fewer rewards might not expect students to risk 16 weeks of added commitment.

Goodwill Industries of Arkansas

After beginning the *Almost Qualified Program*, it became obvious that there were many more applicants than there were DFJ openings. Additionally, DFJ began receiving calls from other local employers concerning the success of the program. Therefore, a partnership was created between Pulaski Technical College and Goodwill Industries of Arkansas to redirect those not finding employment at DFJ. In some cases, students separated from the program before graduation, but still gained benefit from Goodwill as a coaching source, providing additional options to these non-selected students. Students, who graduate Phase One but are not selected to continue, may re-apply for the next series of classes and are not required to repeat Phase One.

College Contracts – Facility & Adjunct Instructors

Pulaski Technical College (PTC) enters into a formal contract with DFJ which states the terms and conditions of the partnership. The college agrees to provide their facility, machinery, hand tools, and instructors. DFJ helps PTC by specifying the machinery, tools, and safety equipment which are the same or equivalent to that used by DFJ.

DFJ also informally acts as liaison, providing the recommended names of DFJ supervision who are interested in evening work as adjunct instructors. Normally, the adjunct instructors are Millennials who enjoy the opportunity to share their knowledge and give back to their community. PTC pays these adjuncts salaries which are comparatively quite attractive for part time work. The adjunct instructor salaries are also included in the contracted cost of the agreement.

PTC benefits from this contract not only from their customary profit but also by increasing their student headcount. DFJ can further benefit in the form of potential reimbursements from the State for the cost of the program.

Results of the Program

Starting in late 2014, the program has been in place for about 18 months and is regarded as highly successful by DFJ management. Graduates who have entered the DFJ workforce have consistently exceeded expectations. They are extremely grateful for the opportunity to gain a rewarding technical career and to work in a pleasant environment. They consistently look for opportunities to exceed the performance levels of traditional workers and are aggressively creative. During the 18 months of the program, the retention rate has exceeded 95%. The average cost to DFJ has been approximately \$3,500 per hired worker. Much of these costs have been reimbursed by the State. Pulaski Technical College has begun duplicating the program in other markets.

Unlike out-of-state new-hires, the vast majority of students entering the program are already local residents. Therefore, we believed that these workers will remain with DFJ for long and rewarding careers.

Some Keys to Success

It is believed that an indispensable key to the success of the *Almost Qualified Program* is the use of DFJ frontline supervision acting as adjunct instructors. Although performance rubrics are used to give structure and validity to the evaluation process, undoubtedly the years of supervisory experience along with their intuition, provides the supervisor/adjuncts a high level of selection reliability. If asked for the basis of their selection, these adjuncts may say, "I have difficulty putting success into words; I just know it when I see it!"

In addition to intuition, the identification with and support that the DFJ adjunct develops for the student grows. During the 16 weeks, camaraderie develops and the supervisor begins to look forward to on-boarding his/her students. And after the student becomes a DFJ employee, this camaraderie is augmented by the assignment of On-the-Job training coaches - and other friendships develop. In short, the DFJ adjunct becomes personally invested in their students and bridges the transition between job seeker and new employee.



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A Closing Comment

Unfortunately, a limiting factor (totally outside of the control of the student) to achieving employment at DFJ is the number of apprentice-level employees that DFJ can absorb in a given period. A next step in the improvement of the Almost Qualified Model might be exploring ways (such as the Goodwill efforts) to better identify and support those individuals who made the initial phone call, but for various reasons, did not achieve their end goal.

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