



TRAINER OF THE YEAR: RICHARD HURLEY

Richard Hurley (right) received his award at the MPGD awards dinner in March from ITO chairman and then MPGD board member John Simmiss.

An Auckland plumber who believes his two apprentices are his company's biggest assets is this year's Master Plumbers, Gasfitters and Drainlayers' Trainer of the Year.

Richard Hurley, who set up his plumbing company some 22 years ago, caught the attention of the judges with what they described as taking "a very active personal interest in his apprentices, treating them as part of the family – even working with them in his home to complete their distance learning".

The Trainer of the Year title is a much coveted award and Richard said that having a family of five stood him in good stead when training his two ITO apprentices – James 22 and Jesse 19 – the young apprentices at his Auckland plumbing business, Somerset Plumbing.

To keep them focused on their distance learning assignments can be much like the nagging to get homework done, he says and requires even more effort given that the boys have just spent a hard day's work on the building site or doing plumbing maintenance jobs.

Richard sees his apprentices as his means of expanding the business once they're registered and licensed and says he'd also rather train them himself from day one than take on another company's apprentice. "That way you know what you're getting. If you bring your own up and instill them with your own values, they're 'user-friendly' to your company from day one and you get a lot of loyalty from them."

Somerset Plumbing, on Auckland's North Shore, largely does light commercial and domestic work, both new and maintenance, but Richard tries to ensure that his two apprentices get the wide range of work experience they need for their qualifications . . . and he tries to get it at the time it is relevant to their course work!

Richard did his own plumbing apprenticeship in England, where his course work involved one day every week at college, mornings doing paperwork and afternoons on practical. He set up and ran his own plumbing business for about five years before heading out to see the world, eventually ending up in NZ. He was just planning to move when he met his wife and settled down to life here.

His current apprentices are the first he has employed and he is totally dedicated to helping them succeed, always willing to sit down when they are stuck with a bit of paperwork and go through it with them. At the end of the day, he says, the success of any apprentice lies in their own commitment to the job. "They've got to want to do it and have the drive to carry it through." ■