

# Kayla Cole

Trainee

Manufacturing Renaissance

If you love meeting people who are living out their passion, then meet Kayla Cole. When she joined the program at Manufacturing Renaissance (MR), she already possessed theoretical and some technical skills. A graduate of the Chicago Women In Trades program, she later got an associate degree in Integrated Systems Technology. To say that Cole was primed for action before joining MR would be an understatement.

Listening to her name all of the things that she learned before joining the program is impressive by itself. “Foundational knowledge in installing, repairing, maintaining, troubleshooting, aligning, and operating industrial equipment,” she listed. “Welding using stick (Shielded Metal Arc Welding), MIG (Metal Inert Gas Welding), and TIG (Tungsten Inert Gas Welding). I had my first exposure to blueprints, measuring devices, and hands-on assembly.” With all of that technical skill, why did she feel the need to join MR?

After completing college, she experienced a period of unemployment that challenged her to sharpen her talents even more. She submitted her résumé for feedback, participated in mock interviews as practice, and was disciplined enough to do self-directed studies of topics in AutoCAD, Excel, Programmable Logic Controllers (PLC), and Python. “During that time, the only thought that was going through my mind was continuous self improvement,” said Cole. She also attended a few job preparation boot camps, even ones that were loosely aligned with what she was looking for. “I had to do everything in my power to make myself an attractive candidate for a manufacturing position.”

If you think being so educated, but experiencing difficulty finding a job would have made Cole doubt herself, you

would be wrong. Such was her desire to make it, that she could not afford to let doubt sneak in. “When I was at Chicago Women In Trades, the first time I struck an arc while stick welding, that was it for me,” Cole recalled. “I knew that I was going into the great unknown, and everything that is going to be thrown my way, I’m going to overcome it. I’m going to excel at the task at hand. I’m going to finish this to the end, and I’m going to leave a legacy for those after me.”

When she read about MR on a Facebook group called Chicago Area Resources For Employment, Housing and Education, she seized the opportunity. “MR was not only a refresher for me, they also stressed foundational technical skill,” described Cole. She felt that in many ways, the training at MR expanded upon and broadened the scope of her previous education. “No program is redundant, improvement can always be found. And I highly recommend MR for all levels of manufacturing.”

For Cole, the advantage that differentiated MR from the job preparation boot camps that she attended prior to joining the program was its manufacturing focus. “I was having problems jumpstarting my manufacturing career, and this is where MR stepped in,” she explained. “In comparison, my prior experience at other boot camps was like having a toothache, but going to a chiropractor versus going to an actual dentist.”



Beyond her training, she sees herself developing a lifelong relationship with MR. MR is a source of support that she cannot get anywhere else. “I don’t have any family in manufacturing, and none of my associates are in manufacturing. So I’m literally a one woman show,” explained Cole. “It can be an isolating experience not having anyone to talk to about what you’re going through or even getting incredible advice.”

A young adult, Cole is only at the beginning of her career, but speaks with the wisdom of a sage veteran. Although she wants to become an Electrical Engineer with the skill set of a Master Troubleshooter, her idea of success is grounded in who she is. “Success to me, is ultimately about internal respect,” she said. “I display respect for myself in completing the job with accuracy, speed, and within budget constraints.”

For Cole, this internal respect outwardly looks like professionalism to others, and is vital for making it in manufacturing. “Sometimes you can look for respect from so many people, then you end up compromising yourself trying to please somebody else. Internal respect means I’m going to come here, and I’m going to do what the company has hired and paid me for.