

Vanessa Hall

Trainee

Northland Workforce Training Center & Harmac
Employee

Vanessa Hall was destined to go into manufacturing and she didn't even know it. The opportunities kept pursuing her until she finally decided to give in. Now, she's one of NWTC's most popular ambassadors, spreading the word about the program throughout her community.

Right out of high school, she became a bill collector for a bank where she worked for ten years. Although she loved it, there was something that she began to notice. "I realized that computers were taking over my job, and that's what changed everything for me," Hall said. "I wasn't leaving voicemails anymore. I was pushing a button."

As someone who loves talking with people, and not seeing a future in an industry that was becoming automated, she transitioned to caregiving. "I started working for people with disabilities. I liked it, but I got attached. I'm a hugger, and I'm a crier," she said, "so I took a lot of emotional baggage home."

Then one morning at the end of her overnight shift caring for someone, she heard an interview with a career coach on a radio station that she never listens to. It was someone from NWTC talking about the opportunity of manufacturing jobs in Buffalo. Hall listened closely, remembered the interview, but didn't think much of it because she was focused on her caregiving.

Then a few days later, after a discouraging day at work, she heard another commercial for NWTC on a station that she frequently listens to while driving home. She thought the coincidence was interesting, but didn't think more about it.

A few days after that, laying in her bed scrolling through Facebook on her phone, she came upon an ad for NWTC. This time, she felt like this was a

sign to learn more about the program. "I have always suspected that my cell phone could read my mind, but this was very odd," recalled Hall. "The signs could not have been any clearer, so I decided to fill out an application." NWTC invited her to come to an information session the next day, but Hall couldn't make it because her best friend passed.

Soon after the funeral, she took a trip to Southern California, for the comfort and support of her family. There the fellowship with them was inspirational and spiritual, but another family tradition seemed timed just right. "We have mentoring sessions, where we get together as a family, talk about goals, and things that we want," explained Hall. "After that mentoring session, I went to Venice Beach, sat on the beach, and said to myself: I cannot go back to Buffalo and be the same Vanessa that I was. Something has to give."

Upon returning to Buffalo, she called NWTC to see if it was too late to join the program. It wasn't. "I went down there, and I think that's what changed everything for me." Hall took a bunch of brochures home to figure out which specialty worked for her. Her love of puzzles and numbers inspired her to choose mechatronics,



understanding that all she needed to do was show up and want to learn. NWTC helped her apply for financial aid and scholarships too. She was set.

“I’m a visual learner. That’s how I’ve always been,” explained Hall. “You can give me a book to read, but if you can show me in 30 seconds what to do, I will retain that information, understand it, and be able to break it down.” When NWTC exposed Hall to Buffalo’s manufacturing industry through various career fairs, she began to appreciate the job security that she was working on for herself. Many of the companies were looking for talented women and people of color just like her.

Before graduating from NWTC, Hall interned at the Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority (NFTA). Although she enjoyed it, she had to give it up because she was also working full-time for Harmac as a mechanical set-up technician. She was interning from 7 AM to 2 PM, and then she would catch the bus down the street to work at Harmac, every day, Monday through Friday.

While employed at the NFTA, Hall had surgery on her stomach. The physical toll of her internship with the transit authority made her recovery difficult. Suddenly, laying on her stomach in various positions, bending in the back of the bus, and habitual heavy lifting wasn’t a good fit for her.

“I couldn’t see myself rolling 150-pound bus tires when I’m 60,” quipped Hall. “That’s why I chose Harmac, because it’s a clean environment.”

And she is a vocal advocate for NWTC. Whether people are recently out of prison, chatting after church, or eating at a community event, Hall shares her testimony of changing careers at 32: “I spent nine months of my life in the program to set me up for a lifetime of success.”