

Wade Smith

Career Coach

Northland Workforce Training Center

Anyone who is in the process of changing from one way of life to another needs someone like Wade Smith in their corner. As the senior career coach at NWTC, Smith helps students find their footing in manufacturing. From the 18-year-old getting their first taste of the workforce, to the middle-aged professional upskilling for a new career, Smith is there for them.

Teaching others to foster the good habits that lead to success comes from his high school sports background. Playing football, baseball, and basketball gave him a mental toughness that has served him well in his over 25-year career in social work case management. From helping disadvantaged youth in group homes, to counseling households who were in danger of losing their children to public services, to helping felons as they transition from incarceration to freedom – Smith has been at the right place at the right time for those in need. In life, just as in sports, timing is everything.

“With that background, working as a career coach was a smooth transition, just from the standpoint of my experience of helping individuals improve their daily lives,” said Smith. “Even though I never worked in an educational setting, it still comes down to customer service, case management, assisting students and individuals with their barriers, and just teaching them better ways of doing things that they might not know.”

Smith is someone who understands the students at NWTC and is willing to help them overcome their issues. Like a good coach, he is persistent in teaching his lessons, because he knows that is the only way they will succeed. His approach to career coaching is to ask himself what he can do to assist an individual to better

themselves every day.

Just like he did on the playing field, practicing every day meant continuous improvement with more playing time as a reward. Practicing once or twice a week meant mediocrity, resulting in someone else getting the playing time while he sat on the bench. Smith wants the students at NWTC to see their careers the same way.

“I’m trying to plant the seed that they shouldn’t take any day for granted. Come in each day, have an open mind, and be ready to learn,” said Smith. “Whether you’re a welder, an electrician, or a machinist, try to get better each day. I encourage my students to have the same mindset.”

He doesn’t only manage his caseload of students, but feels it is his duty to be helpful. Some people might just see this as a job, and not care to help when they can. But he looks at his coaching from the human perspective. “I feel this is my purpose,” said Smith. “Another person might look at this as only a job. If somebody comes to me for help, and I look at this as only a job, then I might rush through the process and give them some stuff just to keep them moving. But I don’t look at this as a job.”

With students starting from different levels, coming from disparate backgrounds, varying experiences, and



distinct issues, Smith helps them get the best out of themselves. Even when someone doesn't listen to his recommendations and fails, Smith does not abandon them. He works with them to learn about their issues and how they plan to keep a job. "We don't give up on them. Hopefully, they can learn from the experience. We bring them back in, we discuss what went wrong, and I tell them the things they need to do to be better next time. But if they don't apply them, then the same thing is going to happen again," explained Smith. "Buffalo's not a big community. If they aren't serious about changing their attitude, we don't want to send them out there again and burn bridges."

"I'm a Career Coach. I can give you the game plan. But if you're not willing to execute it and do your part, it's not going to work." Smith's fair, firm, and helpful approach is appreciated by the students at NWTC who speak glowingly about his assistance. He helps so many of them, that he can't remember exactly what he did most of the time, but they remember. When a person is expecting a disruptive or profound change in their life, Smith is that person they want on their side.