

Mentors needed to assist tomorrow's plumbers and gas fitters today
New e-mentoring pilot program, just one hour a week

Rheem Australia is calling for mentors in the plumbing and gas fitting industries for an exciting new pilot e-mentoring initiative developed in partnership with Campbell Page, one of Australia's leading not-for-profit community services organisations.

Your members hold a wealth of knowledge, whether they currently work as a plumber or a gas fitter, own a business, are retired, or are a trade industry teacher. It's this knowledge and experience that are invaluable in helping those just starting out in their career – and it's a great way to give back to the industry for only an hour a week.

The Rheem Apprenticeships and Youth Scheme (RAYS) links mentors and mentees using Campbell Page's e-mentoring suite. The pilot program is based on a sophisticated website, which goes live at the end of February, that will match apprentices and mentors according to their career aspirations and experience. The website then facilitates ongoing conversations in a secure online environment that can have a lasting effect on an apprentice's or young tradesperson's career.

"There is a high attrition rate amongst trainees and apprentices, and working closely with Campbell Page we hope we can improve this outlook by providing the support trainees and apprentices need," says Gareth Jennings, Rheem Australia's public affairs manager.

"Mentors don't have to be an employer or have a minimum number of years in the industry, they only need industry knowledge and an interest in helping us secure and nurture tomorrow's qualified plumbers and gas fitters. For just an hour a week, mentoring can be hugely rewarding."

What mentors can expect

- **Training:** All RAYS mentors will receive online and over-the-phone training, which takes up to two hours
- **Tips and hints:** Campbell Page will provide useful tips for mentors on how to engage with mentees, and they will be taught questioning techniques
- **Careful matching:** Mentors will be matched as closely as possible with the profiles of mentees and will assist by being a positive role model
- **Setting goals:** Mentees will be asked to nominate a particular goal they want to reach with their mentor
- **Setting expectations:** One of the mentors' roles will be to temper mentees' expectations of the industry and to be a trusted sounding board
- **Support:** Mentors will encourage and support mentees and offer advice and guidance
- **Time commitment:** Mentors will need to invest just an hour per week (approximately)

The mentors would be assigned up to six mentees each, ideally for a minimum of 12 months, allowing the mentor/mentee relationship to develop.

Assisting the next generation of plumbers and gas fitters

Rheem Australia is committed to assisting the next generation of plumbers and gas fitters, and in 2012 the company developed the Rheem Apprentice Grant Scheme in celebration of its 75th anniversary, providing 75 apprentices each with a \$1000 grant to help with the cost of their apprenticeship.

The Rheem Apprentice Plumber Grants attracted more than 300 entries, and now Rheem is considering the grants as part of an ongoing initiative to provide industry support to invest in its skills future.

“It’s why we have also worked with Campbell Page to develop the e-mentoring program, and we urge as many potential mentors as possible to come forward to offer their support. The objective is for mentors and mentees to develop quality relationships based on trust, respect, understanding and empowerment,” says Gareth.

E-mentoring

It has long been recognised the value of mentoring in helping people complete their education, develop skills, choose a career and find and remain in a job.

“E-mentoring takes face-to-face mentoring online and overcomes the biggest challenges to this traditional approach – geography and time,” says Sharon Hampton, National Manager, Youth & Family Programs, Campbell Page.

With the advent of web-based technologies, e-mentoring has become popular in the northern hemisphere over the last decade and is gaining momentum in Australia. The RAYS program will be piloted for a year, and if successful, Campbell Page will continue the program as well as consider the format for other industries.

“We believe plumbing and gas fitting are foundational trades and play a fundamental role in maintaining a healthy community and a vibrant growing economy,” says Sharon. “Quite simply, these are trades that warrant our support.”

Importance of apprentices

There were 470,000 Australian apprentices in-training as at 31 March 2012, an increase of 2.4 per cent from the previous year. Apprenticeships are recognised as essential to the Australian economy and until this month, SMEs received a bonus payment for employing an apprentice as part of the national Kickstart initiative.

Apprentices often start their apprenticeship enjoying the nature and variety of work, with aspirations of one day owning their own business. However, according to the National Centre for Vocational Education Research, completion rates for apprenticeships hover at around 46 per cent. A mentor can help an apprentice work through difficulties, be it training, employer related or even financial, and help keep them in their chosen profession and reach their career goals.

Any plumbers and gas fitters who are interested in becoming a RAYS mentor should email mentorME@eMentoring.org.au for further information.

About Rheem Australia – www.rheem.com.au

Rheem has been manufacturing in Australia since 1937 and is the largest producer of water heaters in Australia. Its brands include Rheem, Solahart, Edwards, Vulcan, Raypak, Accent Air and Everhot. It employs in excess of 1300 people in Australia in five manufacturing facilities in NSW, Victoria and Western Australia. It has additional subsidiary organisations in New Zealand, China and Europe. It is the worldwide market leader in Solar Thermal products.

About Campbell Page – www.campbellpage.org.au

Campbell Page provides employment, disability and community services to a diverse range of people including some of Australia's most disadvantaged. It's an organisation dedicated to 'Getting Australia Working' by helping people overcome barriers to employment, completing education, gaining workplace skills and finding and keeping a job. Its focus on increasing and maintaining the numbers of apprentices is a key priority.