

Michael Bass



On overcoming disagreements: “You have to know what your position is and then try to put yourself in other people’s shoes. Even if you can’t, you’ve got to identify that this person is still your teammate, you’re working for the same company, and you’re still trying to accomplish the same goals. Remember that this person is actually trying to accomplish the same thing as you. They’re just trying to do it a different way.”

–Michael Bass, July 7, 2009

Michael Bass isn’t very old. He’s just 26. Yet he already wants to mentor young technical school students. “Outreach and mentoring is probably one of the most valuable things we (as technical school alumni) can do.” Michael has good reason to reach out to future laser optics technicians: If not for *his* mentor, he wouldn’t even have been a photonics student.

Michael began an electronics engineering technology degree at Central Carolina Community College (CCCC) after high school. But Gary Beasley, head instructor for laser and photonics technology at CCCC, saw potential in Michael and spent two years recruiting him. “Gary recruited me to the photonics curriculum right after my electronics curriculum. He’s an extremely passionate person for photonics and education in general. It was fascinating to see the demonstrations he did. He understood the photonics industry, how huge the growth and market are. If it wasn’t for Gary’s passion and dedication to the student, then I would not be where I am today.”

That Michael inherited Gary Beasley’s passion is obvious when he is asked about his career field. “Photonics is such a young industry. Most photonics jobs are on the cutting edge of technology. That’s one of the things I find most interesting, working with technology and taking it from the research and development stage to a practical application stage, whether it is manufacturing, medical, or telecommunications. The applications of photonics are almost endless, which means the opportunities that can be opened for you are very broad.”

But other aspects of Michael’s education at CCCC play major roles in his job every day. “The associate degree wasn’t just about learning one type of math or very specific physics laws. It was really building the technical foundation and learning how to be a good employee, how to work in a team, and how to solve normal everyday challenges that face technicians in the field.” The greatest assets he

acquired while at CCCC, Michael says, are “having a foundation of technical knowledge and learning to be a self-motivated person who has the desire to be successful.”

And “successful” can easily describe Michael’s career to date. He works for BrightView Technologies, a start-up company that manufactures optical films for the management of light distribution. “These optical films consist of billions of microstructures or microlenses that manage light, making them more aesthetically pleasing or adjusting the viewing angle for light distribution.” Michael started as a technician three years ago for BrightView’s main technology platform, called E-lamps. “Today, I am responsible for the well-being of this whole system: everything from the optics alignment and calibrations of the system all the way to manufacturing, logistics, and process controls. It’s very interesting; I’m in a world between research/development and manufacturing.”

Working in the transitional area between research/development and manufacturing is both the most difficult and most fascinating part of Michael’s job. “Some days I love it. Some days I hate it because it’s so frustrating. But I do know it has taught me an immense amount of information I could not have learned on only one side or the other. Being stuck in between has enabled me to be extremely valuable to the company on both sides. Many other technologies that lasers are being used in have to be shifted from a research environment to a manufacturing environment. That is one of the things I identified as very fascinating and very prevalent in the photonics industry. Manufacturing and research, that’s a double-edged sword, but there’s no doubt I absolutely love it and am learning so much. I actually love my job with a passion.”

Like his mentor before him, Michael wants to pass on his passion for photonics to the newest students, with an added focus on people skills. The ability to work with and support people may not sound hard but it manages to challenge Michael regularly. “A significant portion of my job is working with people. One of the greatest challenges I have in my career is being able to work side by side with people, disagree on things, but still be able to support them. Being successful in any career, I believe, is not a matter of knowing more math or more physics theories than somebody else. It’s being able to work with people, being optimistic, and being able to solve problems.”

Michael Bass lives in Fuquay Varina, North Carolina. He received associate in applied science degrees in electronics engineering technology and laser and photonics technology from Central Carolina Community College in Sanford, North Carolina. He and his wife enjoy supporting the Carolina Panthers and Hurricanes. They are expecting their first child near the end of 2009.