

HFTFS PRIZE 2018

APPLICATION PART 1

READING #1

HARBOR FREIGHT
TOOLS FOR SCHOOLS

Conveying the Rewards of a Skilled Trades CareerExcerpted from [*Shop Class as Soulcraft: An Inquiry into the Value of Work*](#)

By Matthew B. Crawford

I started working as an electrician's helper shortly before I turned fourteen. I wasn't attending school at that time and worked full-time until I was fifteen, then kept the trade up during the summers while in high school and college, with steadily increasing responsibility. When I couldn't get a job with my college degree in physics, I was glad to have something to fall back on, and went into business for myself, in Santa Barbara.

I never ceased to take pleasure in the moment, at the end of a job, when I would flip the switch. "And there was light." It was an experience of agency and competence. The effects of my work were visible for all to see, so my competence was real for others as well; it had a social currency. I was sometimes quieted at the sight of a gang of conduit entering a large panel in an industrial setting, bent into nestled, flowing curves, with varying offsets, that somehow all terminated in the same plane. This was a skill so far beyond my abilities that I felt I was in the presence of some genius, and the man who bent that conduit surely imagined this moment of recognition as he worked.

As a residential and light-commercial electrician, most of my work got covered up inside walls. Still, I felt pride in meeting the aesthetic demands of a workmanlike installation. Maybe another electrician would see it someday. Even if not, I felt responsible to my better self. Or rather, to the thing itself—craftsmanship has been said to consist simply in the desire to do something well, for its own sake. If the primary satisfaction is intrinsic and private in

this way, there is nonetheless a sort of self-disclosing that takes place. As the philosopher Alexandre Kojève writes,

The man who works recognizes his own product in the World that has actually been transformed by his work; he recognizes himself in it, he sees in it his own human reality, in it he discovers and reveals to others the objective reality of his humanity, of the originally abstract and purely subjective idea he has of himself.

The satisfactions of manifesting oneself concretely in the world through manual competence have been known to make a man quiet and easy. They seem to relieve him of the felt need to offer chattering *interpretations* of himself to vindicate his worth. He can simply point: the building stands, the car now runs, the lights are on. Boasting is what a boy does, because he has no real effect in the world. But the tradesman must reckon with the infallible judgment of reality, where one's failures or shortcomings cannot be interpreted away. His well-founded pride is far from the gratuitous "self-esteem" that educators would impart to students, as though by magic.

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