

A Day In The Life Of

A Laser Operator (We've all employed this guy!)

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Some hard experience and light relief

My name is Isaac Leverdick and I am a laser cutting machine operator. I would like to enlighten you on the day-to-day activities of a laser cutting professional.

The laser cutting industry really has presented me with a career opportunity I never thought would happen. Here I am today, a fully qualified laser cutting expert when it seems like only yesterday I was a security consultant at the local tap dancing club.

When I came to the interview for this job the boss told me that the machines were so good these days that, virtually, all I had to do was press the right buttons. As my wife has told me that I always know how to press the right buttons, I knew this was going to be the job for me.

I soon found out that it was not quite that simple, I had to put material onto the machine and check the components and pack them for delivery, for ten minutes in every hour it was non-stop – much harder than I expected.

Picking the right material is easy, mild steel is dark, stainless steel is shiny and aluminium is the same as stainless steel except it's lighter. Sometimes if I can't find the right mild steel I use stainless steel but the customer doesn't mind cause he likes it when it's shiny.

It's important to place the material in the right place on the bed and sometimes this can be difficult (because sometimes it is very heavy) - unless it is polished stainless steel, then it's OK because it slides easy.

When I have cut the first part I have to check the measurements – this is the easy bit.

Sometimes it can be a bit confusing because the part I have cut doesn't look like the drawing I have been given. This is usually because I have been given the wrong drawing and so I just cut them anyway, the last thing I want to do is to waste several hours until someone comes in the morning.

Talking about drawings, sometimes the customer sends us a new drawing because he can't make up his mind what he wants. In this case we have a choice which one to use and we usually use the old one because that's the one we know best.

You have to take a good look at the profile and count the holes to make sure you have got enough of them, it's better to have an extra one than be short. (It's also important to make sure that they are packed well because I have known the time when I have cut holes that have not been there when they arrive).

To check the measurements you use a vernier or a ruler. An important point here is to make sure that, if you use the vernier to open the Budweiser you had with your sarnies, you should make sure you have no bits of cork stuck between the prongs.



Checking the thickness is important and you have to know what you're doing. Sometimes it might be 10mm or 10swg (the same thing) or 5mm or 6mm (nearly the same thing) or it might be 1mm which is quite thin.

Before you can be certain that the job is finished you have to make sure that you have cut enough. I never thought I would say this but I really am glad that we spent all that time at school chanting the multiplication tables. It really is useful to know that nine times eight is ninety-eight and seven times six is seventy-six etc. etc.

There are a few rules that we have to follow, this is some of them:

1. If we must go to sleep and fall headfirst into the Sun crossword we should make sure we do it when there are no visitors in the building.
2. We must not walk over sheets of steel unless the tread pattern on our boots has been approved by JCB.
3. If we have a slow job and plenty of time on our hands we are allowed to clean up around our machine if we want to.
4. If another operator needs a hand you are expected to help but it is usually OK to leave it until you have finished the paper or, if there is a match on the radio, until half time.
5. Once you have started a job on the machine it is alright to walk away as long as you return within half an hour of it finishing.

I hope this has given you an idea of what it is like to be a professional laser operator. For me it's the greatest thing since Walsall drew with Manchester United and the wife won a free set of teeth in the bingo raffle.

(This article was written without collaboration with management and was published just after Isaac Leverdick's return to the security industry)