

Your workplace contacts

April 08, 2019

Scott O'Connell traces his immersion in the union movement back to 10 weeks standing on a picket line outside the mine he worked for, as non-union workers were bussed in to do his job.

It was his first job as a mines mechanic and says he has seen the good times and the bad in his working life, which has included two stints as a TAFE teacher broken in the middle by a return to the coalface to further his skill set.

"I left TAFE for three years to pursue advancement within my field of training in the mining sector in maintenance training management but an industry downturn proved fatal for that decision," he said.

Mr O'Connell comes from a strong labour background, and has been "a proud union member" since he was 16 — "as a first-year apprentice in the coal industry that couldn't wait to join up".



He needed little encouragement to put his hand up for the Federation Representative and TAFE TA Councillor roles.

"It was my own inner drive and motivation, that little voice in the back of my head that said, 'Hey mate, we need to ensure that every employee gets treated fairly, has good working conditions and gets paid accordingly for the work they produce'," said Mr O'Connell, whose teaching areas include mobile plant equipment, heavy vehicles and auto electrical.

"We service/provide training and assessment at our Hunter Valley campus for the students that work in the coal industry, construction, support services, local businesses, road transport just to name a few."

He believes the nation is facing tertiary educational problems now because the Government wanted TAFE to be run like a business and not a commonwealth educational institution.

"It is a fact that the economy grows and falls, never getting to an even balance, so there are lean times and good," he said.

"The fluctuating market and jobs growth is out of TAFE's control, but what is in TAFE and the governments' control is to ensure the good times are fully supported by an educational infrastructure that produces the best tradespeople we can.

"Nothing comes without a cost, so to continue to cut budgets, reduce face-to-face teaching hours and to close campuses is not the answer.

"TAFE has provided tertiary education in this country for many more years than other private establishments

have and has a reputation that surpasses the others. Contestable funding and Smart and Skilled has to go, we need to Stop TAFE Cuts and running TAFE into the ground."

What he loves about TAFE teaching is the argument he would use for anyone undecided about representing their workplace.

"Would you like a flexible rewarding workplace that offers fair wages, deserved realistic time off in line with the hard work that you do as a teacher?" he would ask. To have conditions that a lot of employees only dream of, see government guaranteeing high-level funding towards public education?

"Well, here is an opportunity of a lifetime. How would you like to ensure that all these things you love about your job are not pulled out from under you and your workmates feet? Would you like to stand proud and provide an honourable service to all members in your workplace? Then follow me into the light my friend."

In his spare time Mr O'Connell is made for music. "I'm a muso through and through," he said. "I own a music production studio where I write, play, produce, record. I am also in a band with my best friend, my brother and have been in bands nearly my whole life."

He recently shed his rock star locks for a good cause, the World's Greatest Shave, raising money for the fight against blood cancer.

"The hair is not just for the rock star look but now also for a very worthy cause," he said. "My wife's former boss died last year from leukaemia and he helped my family out many years ago by giving my wife a job when we had two small children and I was out of work struggling to make ends meet. So, this is my little way of saying thank you and maybe make a small difference."