

From Machine Operator to Automation Technician: Nicholas Elizondo's Journey to Career Confidence

For Nicholas Elizondo, making things work has always been second nature. After spending eight years as a machine operator, he realized he wanted more than just a job — he wanted a career. **“I’ve always had a thing for maintenance,”** he says, **“but I wanted to upskill, get out of my comfort zone, and grow into something I could really enjoy.”**

His first steps weren’t easy. Nicholas explored programs at several colleges, including Fresno City and Reedley, before landing at San Joaquin Valley College, where he took a class that introduced him to programmable logic controllers (PLCs). That class sparked a turning point. Originally planning to become an electrician, he discovered the Industrial Automation program at College of the Sequoias, and everything clicked into place.



“The program was exactly what I was looking for,” Nicholas says. **“I love working with my hands and making things function. And the COS program gives you all of that — from wiring to programming to actual hands-on troubleshooting.”**

Nicholas is now an Automation Technician at [Moonlight Companies](#), a grower, packer, and shipper of fresh fruit based in Reedley, CA. There he installs and troubleshoots PLCs, programs HMIs, and works with real-world systems just like the ones he

trained on at COS. “Everything we did in the program — VFD installation and programming, PLC programming, HMI programming, and Industrial Networking — I use now in the field. It all came together. It clicks.”

His instructors have seen his passion and dedication firsthand. Travis Asher, Industrial Automation Professor at College of the Sequoias, commented on Nicholas being a standout student. “Nicholas came to COS after completing an industrial maintenance program elsewhere, eager to grow his skills in automation,” says Asher. “His curiosity, strong work ethic, and passion for learning technical skills that he can apply on the job made him stand out as a student. He was particularly interested in PLC programming and troubleshooting. Often, he practiced outside of class using free software and came in with thoughtful questions. It’s no surprise he is now thriving as an Automation Technician at Moonlight Packing, applying the very skills he developed in our program.”

What stood out most in the program, beyond the hands-on experience, was the support of the instructors, Bryan Medina and Travis Asher.

“Bryan and Travis were instrumental in guiding me,” Nicholas says.

“Travis went out of his way to help me get into the program and really tailors the classroom labs to what we do on the job. And Bryan? I was constantly picking his brain whenever I saw



him. He played a major role in my growth by encouraging me to apply what I learned in the program directly at the facility and he continues to mentor me as my supervisor at Moonlight. Both instructors are highly respected in their field, and I learned everything I could from them.”

Nicholas is proud of where he’s landed — not just with a new job, but with the confidence to be independent on the job site. **“I’m already out in the field doing the work, using what I learned. That’s something I’m really proud of.”**

His advice to future students is “whether you have experience or not, this program is worth considering. It opens the door to so many areas — PLCs, robotics, breweries, oil and liquid systems, and more. You don’t just skim the surface. You really get a strong understanding of how things work.”

For Nicholas, COS’s Industrial Automation program wasn’t just the next step — it was the right one. **“This industry is growing fast. There’s a high demand and not a lot of people with hands-on experience. This program puts you ahead.”**