



ASM Bulletin

Associated Subcontractors of Massachusetts

Issue No. 129

Work Force For Tomorrow – How Will We Find Them?

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Since time began the construction industry has been frustrated by the very negative image and reputation it enjoys as a bad place to work. You can be injured or killed or laid off. If you manage to live, you can look forward to a job that is looked down upon as difficult and dirty.

So where and how will we find the work force for the future? Why would anybody want to work in this industry? Since many of the people who own construction businesses talk openly about all the industry's problems and detractions ... **who is talking for us?** Since many of the people who work in all ranks and positions in construction talk openly about all its problems and detractions... **who is talking for us?**

Every negative Big Dig story just keeps reinforcing all the stereotypes. The complaints go on and on. All the reasons **why not** are on a very long list!

We need to stop and think about how we are contributing to our own problems.

Let's make the case as to why people should consider a career in the trades. First of all, the people who already work in construction need to hold their heads high and take personal pride in their chosen field. I do. The construction business has been an excellent work experience for me and I am proud to state it publicly. Construction is a vital, necessary industry to our country.

The root causes of so much dissatisfaction are hearts and minds issues. We as individuals need self-satisfaction and a belief in our own worth. There is also a sales and marketing issue. Let's deal with the hearts and minds first. Employers, consultants, designers, owners, managers, supervisors, journeymen and apprentices all have the same interests. The future of all our careers rest on the next generation and the one after that to join us and carry on the industry. If we build a successful industry that is a magnet for new employees, we will have a bright future. The present trend is a negative one and if unchecked it will foretell the future... a shrinking work force that will further undermine the stability of the entire construction industry.

Someone still needs to NAIL IT, PAINT IT, PLUMB IT, ERECT IT, INSTALL IT, WIRE IT, CABLE IT, WELD IT, HANG IT, and CLEAN IT.

Workers of all abilities want the same things. They want a steady job with a good future that will allow them to have a family, advance personally, be provided a daily challenge, be a contributing member of society, go to a high school football game, grow old and retire to a worry free setting and leave a legacy for their children and grandchildren.

Employers are in the right position to have the greatest positive impact on this huge problem.

Employees need to be nurtured and developed. **You need to take care of your people!** Contrary to popular belief, there is more to life than just money. Lifestyle and security run closely behind! Employees need to be five things: **Trained, Safe, Reliable, Motivated and Productive.**

Companies that put the effort, energy, time and resources into achieving these five goals will be successful in drawing future employees into the industry and into specific trades.

Employers need to recognize that personnel matters require a huge amount of effort. Jack Welch, former CEO of General Electric, once said that he spent **50%** of his time on personnel matters.

Examine his record to see if it was worth that effort. You will find that it was.

Now, let's discuss the sales and marketing aspect of this picture. Adding to individual efforts, the industry needs to play a role on a larger scale. Through trades associations such as the Associated Subcontractors of Massachusetts (ASM) we can further amplify our efforts to "sell" construction as a first choice for employment and career. For example, why don't we (ASM) put together a career day type seminar for high school students to stimulate early interest?

Why can't we address our concerns to local school departments to restore courses and training in manual arts again... only this time with a modern update and better outlook for the future? I don't think we want to go back to the days of solid (woodworking)... as it was known when I was a boy in grammar school. These courses were pushed out of school curriculums by jazzier courses in computers and music and others. We were "outsold" and "out-marketed" by competing interests for the hearts and minds of young students. Contractors need to recognize what many others already have and that is, we need to connect with children at a very early age. Some folks have seized upon the interest children have in construction equipment as a means of fostering interest to sell products. Why can't we capitalize on this same strategy to serve our goals?

This effort requires a strategic plan and an ongoing effort... similar to the effort it takes to run our businesses. There is no magic, quick fix formula. Success is achieved by working effectively every day in a mode of continuous improvement.

Let's not pretend that the entire industry still does not have a great deal to do. We need to address the huge problems of death and injury on the job as well as the other negative facts about life in construction.

Success will be built upon the cumulative efforts of individual companies, one company at a time. This is how we built a great nation.

I have already asked (ASM) to include this topic as part of its strategic planning to see where we can play a bigger, more effective role. It is a matter to which I intend to devote some of my time and energy. I urge all members to take an active role in one of the few causes that are of common interest to **every** type of company that works in and depends upon the construction industry.

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