

# SOUND ADVICE

Here are ways to attract viable employees during a skilled worker shortage. BY PEGGY HOGAN MARKER



» Many young workers are starting to understand there are benefits in construction.

In today's construction industry, it's a worker's market. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, approximately 298,000 construction jobs were available in September 2018. Potential employees are in a position in which they are interviewing employers as much as we are interviewing them. Job offers outnumber job takers. Why – and how – can construction employers find viable, longtime employees?

During the recession of the late 2000s, many of the skilled, seasoned construction workers were forced to leave the industry. Where did that leave us as an industry? Not only did we

lose an incredible amount of talent and dedicated, lifelong craftsmen – we lost many of the people who could train the next generation.

This exodus of skilled workers, coupled with the fact that many families are encouraging their children to go to college rather than pursue a trade, has significantly decreased the number of young people choosing to go into construction. Despite the loss of talented workers in the industry in the late 2000s, many – whether they are tile layers, plumbers, electricians, etc. – stayed and have a true art to pass on, the question remains to whom.

From project administrators to project executives, there is a great shortage of workers that we in the construction industry are all facing. In South Florida, there is much demand for new construction. This includes retirees moving to the state – people are retiring younger and living longer. Many residents of high-tax states are escaping to Florida,

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which has no state tax and a beautiful climate as well as an influx of the younger generation attracted by the booming economy.

This leaves us in construction management with the question: How do we attract and retain viable workers? The state of today's industry requires us to take innovative, and often forward-thinking, approaches to build a team that can handle the demands of today's construction market.

At the South Florida-headquartered construction management and general contracting firm where I serve as president, we understand the imperative need to separate ourselves as a better employer than our competition. We have to make ourselves as attractive to potential workers as possible. This comes as additional costs to us, but this is the cost of doing business.

By working to attract the best team, we are able to offer a better product with a team of people who want to work with us. The benefits of us investing in our employees' happiness are extremely rewarding, whether it's in our bottom line or our positive work environment.

Little do many potential workers – such as plumbers, electricians, brick masons and carpenters – know that they can make a substantial salary a career and not just a job. In South Florida, this is in the range of \$55,000 to \$75,000 per year with full benefits and a pension.

So, how do we attract viable employees? Some of our initiatives include:

- Increased salaries. It's a must. These workers want to make a good living, and they are valued.



- A great workplace. The atmosphere at our firm is extremely family oriented. We ensure that our team members want to be here, and that they enjoy coming to work every day. We support their charitable efforts as a company and individually.
- Providing more days off for our team members. They work hard, so we want them to relax, rejuvenate, and spend time with their friends and family.
- Provide additional training. Although we aren't obligated to provide training and education, we want our team members to improve their skills, which in turn makes them more valuable to us, and happier with what the future may hold for them.
- Provide for higher education. Whether they aspire to receive a master's in construction management, an associate of applied science in construction technology, a construction engineering degree, etc. – we want to help our team members to achieve their dreams. A technical college education – from training to be an HVAC technician to an electrician – is also something that we support.

The good news is that young workers are starting to understand that there are many benefits to working in the construction industry: they can make a great living, enjoy spectacular benefits and have unlimited opportunities for advancement without incurring exorbitant college debt.

It's important to encourage those expressing an interest in construction to try it – to let them know even if they don't want to go directly to a construction firm, that anyone with a high school diploma can go to their local Associated Builders and Contractors (ABC) office to fill out an application and take an aptitude test. ♦

With over 30 years of experience in the construction industry, Peggy Hogan Marker is president of Marker Construction Group, a construction management and general contracting firm which she and her husband founded in 2001. It is headquartered in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., and specializes in commercial, multi-family, condominiums, hospitality, healthcare, and high-end residential construction throughout the state of Florida. To reach Marker, call (954) 767-9767.