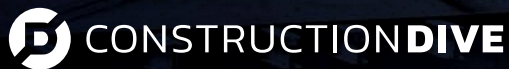


CREATING YOUR VERY OWN TALENT PIPELINE

Innovative ways to build a continuous stream of qualified workers.



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When you have an open position to fill — or need to expand your workforce — what do you do first? Where do you turn to find skilled workers?

For years, talent was available whenever construction companies were ready to hire. Advertising an open position was all it took to get qualified applicants to respond. Building an at-the-ready applicant pool wasn't a concern, because trained and capable workers were always accessible when it was time to hire.

Filling those open positions today is a much larger task that involves more time and a concentrated effort. Currently, you may be taking a reactive approach: You don't start looking for new workers until it's necessary, such as when someone leaves or you're experiencing growth.

Building your very own talent pipeline is one way to connect with new employees when you need them. It involves developing relationships with key people and networks who may serve as potential candidates to fill future roles. When you have a group of prospective applicants waiting in the wings and interested in your industry, you can significantly reduce the costs and time associated with hiring while being proactive instead of reactive in your approach.

“The concern is often, ‘I need someone today,’” explains Jennifer Wilkerson, vice president of innovation and advancement for NCCER (National Center for Construction Education and Research). “If your future workers are still in high school, you’ve got a number of years before they can start working. It’s not an overnight reward when you start to build your pipeline. But, even if you can’t employ them today, take time to make sure that pipeline is being built. It will pay off in the long run — just a few years down the road.”

To establish these vital connections, contractors are trying a range of tactics: holding bring-a-friend events, building referral programs, using recruiters, speaking at community events and keeping in touch with runner-up candidates who made it to the final stages of the hiring process.

But there's one important (and often overlooked) source that can help build a strong backbone for your talent pipeline: school counselors.

WHAT SCHOOL COUNSELORS KNOW ABOUT CONSTRUCTION

Many people in the industry believe that, if construction opportunities were more well known, then the careers would sell themselves. The problem? Getting the word out.

When a high school junior or senior visits the counseling office to learn about future plans, there's often lots of discussion and material available about four-year degree programs that lead to jobs in fields like computer science, business, nursing or education.

Although a recent Build Your Future survey reveals that more than half of school counselors don't believe a four-year degree is vital to build a solid career, many still encourage this direction because it's the path they know the most about. Counselors don't feel confident discussing other options, because they don't know much about them. In other words, counselors don't regularly bring up careers in construction because they don't feel informed enough to discuss them.

According to the American School Counselor Association, a counselor typically serves 464 students and is responsible for boosting success, planning postsecondary career

options and helping with academic planning and goal setting for each student they serve. Beyond that, they're expected to know about many different career paths — from law and medicine to journalism and politics. As a result, they don't have much time leftover to explore career paths they don't know as much about.

Many school counselors are at least aware of construction as a profession, but that's where their expertise ends. In order to answer questions and speak with certainty, they want resources to present it as a viable choice and identify students who might be a good fit.

"Counselors are overloaded," explains Wilkerson. "They tell us they would be more than happy to spread information about the construction industry if they knew how to do it, who to talk to and how to talk about it. Of the 160 counselors surveyed by Build Your Future, 100% said they would share student resources about construction if they were provided. Counselors ask us for information. They just don't know how to get the conversation started or know anyone in the construction industry to talk to."



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JENNIFER WILKERSON
Vice President of Innovation and
Advancement for NCCER

MAKING THE COUNSELOR CONNECTION

“Construction” means more than manual labor. It involves planning, critical thinking, communication, leadership and problem solving. It could mean working in safety, engineering, drone operation, equipment operation, surveying, robotics, project management, estimation, accounting and marketing, to name just a few options.

“Construction hasn’t been seen as a very technologically advanced industry in the past,” says Wilkerson. “But that’s changing, and counselors and teachers need to know. Technology is being used to improve productivity, safety and building processes — whether it’s through drones, virtual walkthroughs or BIM models.”

Contractors play an important role in making sure school counselors understand the significant benefits and advantages of working in this field. Before you reach out to a school counselor, here’s what you need to know about working with them.

WHEN SHOULD I REACH OUT?

The ideal time to reach out to most high school counselors is in the fall (before heavy testing season begins).

HOW SHOULD I REACH OUT?

Find the high schools closest to job sites, and email or call a counselor at each of these schools. Some schools also have CTE (career and technical education) instructors who may be interested in talking to you. Let them know you’re working in the area and are interested in stopping by to meet them.

“If you need a good way to make a connection, let them know you’d like to host a sponsored breakfast or lunch in appreciation of CTE instructors and/or counselors,” says Wilkerson. “You bring the food. During this time, you can also spend a few minutes explaining who you are, what your company does and the potential career paths for students within the world of construction.”





These initial conversations should involve your firm’s owner or recruiter — someone who can explain the industry at a high level, how many people your company hires per year, what types of roles are available and what you’re trying to accomplish (filling your talent pipeline with interested and qualified workers for future positions). Once you make that initial connection, the lines of communication begin to open, and counselors start to understand what you have to offer their students.

From there, you can also propose an onsite or virtual visit to connect with students, answer questions, share stories and tell them about the work you’ve done. For these conversations, it’s worth it to send some of your workers — people students can relate to. “It helps when students can listen to someone talk about their job and think, ‘You look like me, you talk like me and you act like me. I could be you,’” Wilkerson explains.

WHAT SHOULD I TELL THEM?

There’s so much information to share about the industry that it can be hard to know where to start. The goal is to help counselors find the right balance between talking about “lots of construction jobs available” and “construction is an exclusive field that looks for and hires the very best.”

Counselors say they want to know this information about the field:

- Reasons for what’s currently drawing young workers to construction (job security, no school loan debt, etc.).
- Specific examples of career opportunities and upward mobility.
- Hours and salary ranges.
- Necessary training and education and how to get started.
- Verbiage to describe the industry (avoiding “alternative education” or “trades” so it isn’t viewed as a second-tier option).
- Availability of digital tools and presentations they can use to educate students, parents and teachers (resources like Build Your Future offer recruitment materials for this purpose).

To help teachers and counselors better explain what working in construction is like, some contractors give them the opportunity to get hands-on experiences they can later share with students. Each summer, for example, an electrical contractor in Indiana hires school counselors and teachers for three months. These education professionals are paired with the company’s newest construction professionals to provide these new employees with counsel, provide encouragement and make sure they’re happy and satisfied with their work.



GET TO KNOW TODAY'S YOUNG PROS

Reading the headlines can make you think that Generation Z and Generation Alpha workers won't be interested in construction for a variety of reasons. But the language around four-year degrees is changing, students are becoming reluctant to take on massive debt and more conversations are focusing on viable careers that don't require degrees — all of which are piquing a renewed interest in construction.

You can help keep the conversation going by understanding what's drawing younger workers to the field and sharing information that will resonate with high school students when you speak with them.

In a recent Build Your Future survey, young professionals offered insight into why they chose construction and what they enjoy most about it.

Many say they were encouraged by parents and/or friends to join the industry. Beyond these two groups, knowing or meeting somebody

from a construction company or job fair was the leading reason they joined construction, demonstrating the importance of industry connections and involvement.

Many of the industry's young workers already have a bachelor's degree (some even have a master's degree), and they followed a different career path first. Construction didn't become a consideration until they were in college or already working. This is likely due in part to the fact that, when they were in high school, they believed they needed a four-year degree to attain success.

If the construction industry could connect with students sooner — while they are still in high school — students could save time and money, and you could build your talent pipelines faster.

Young construction professionals say they chose this career path because they want:

- To have the best personal life possible and feel construction can give them that.
- To avoid taking on more debt.
- To have excellent salary potential and a job that is high in demand.



WHAT UP-AND-COMING WORKERS WANT FROM THEIR CAREERS

In a recent survey, up-and-coming workers (part of Generation Z) share what they want and expect in terms of future careers, as well as their perceptions about working in construction. Understanding their perspective can help you craft the right messages when talking to them about a career.

First, they're more likely to enter a field if they know someone already working in it. They want to make connections and get to know people through internships, job shadowing and even informal discussions (like those that take place during a school meet-and-greet).

They also want to do work that makes a difference and has a feeling of exclusivity — knowing it takes a special skill set to fill the role. For them, going to work is about more than earning a paycheck.

“Young people today want to make a difference, be part of a community and be part of something bigger,” says Wilkerson. “They want to be happy and fulfilled. Which industry does that better than construction? We build the communities’ hospitals and schools. We rebuild neighborhoods after disaster strikes. We bring new life to communities. We build something bigger than us that will be here for a lifetime — something you can look at and be proud of. Once young workers understand that, they’ll be hooked.”



BUILD YOUR FUTURE

Build Your Future is an initiative powered by nonprofit NCCER. It's designed to educate students about career opportunities in construction and to support the industry's recruitment efforts.

With the support of construction CEOs and association and academic leaders, NCCER's goal is to revolutionize training for the construction industry to develop a safe, sustainable and productive workforce. Its process of accreditation, instructor certification, standardized curriculum, credentials, assessment and certification is a key component in construction workforce development efforts.

Through Build Your Future, NCCER continues to equip the construction industry with what it needs to fit the needs of the next generation and promote opportunities for careers in construction.

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