

The Future of Transportation: Recruiting and Developing the Next Generation of Leaders

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I've seen the transportation industry change dramatically in my nearly three decades working in this industry. From the evolving use of technology to a shifting workforce landscape, our industry now faces one of the most challenging times in terms of workforce recruitment and development. Here are my thoughts on some of the industry's biggest questions on what the industry needs to do to adapt:

WHAT ARE THE BIGGEST CHALLENGES FACING THE TRANSPORTATION WORKFORCE TODAY, AND HOW ARE DEMOGRAPHIC SHIFTS, LIKE RETIREMENTS, IMPACTING THE INDUSTRY?

Undoubtedly, the biggest challenge right now is people —

challenging, whether it's contractors, designers, or construction

This workforce shortage is linked to overall population demographics. Baby boomers, who have been the backbone of the industry for years, are retiring in larger numbers, leaving a gap in the workforce. Generation X is a smaller population

in transportation as attractive. There's a societal push towards certain career paths, which can overshadow the rewarding opportunities available in the transportation construction industry.



While there's often an emphasis on college education for young people today, the transportation industry offers rewarding roles for both degree holders and those without. We need both, and there are robust training and apprenticeship programs available for those who want to develop knowledge and skills in a more hands-on environment.

New technologies, like GPS, reality capture with 360-degree cameras, drones, and advanced construction techniques, make

the industry still suffers from outdated stereotypes, such as the cliché of road workers "leaning on a shovel." We need to correct that image and attract more talent to meet the growing demand.

HOW IS TECHNOLOGY RESHAPING THE SKILLS NEEDED IN THE TRANSPORTATION WORKFORCE, AND WHAT OPPORTUNITIES DOES IT PRESENT FOR DOING MORE WITH FEWER RESOURCES?

Technology has already dramatically reshaped the skill set required compared to as recently as 10 years ago. Today, there's

is using tablets and workers need to adapt quickly to new software. The ability to learn and master new technologies rapidly is crucial.

On the technical side, the use of GPS for equipment operators

processes like setting survey stakes, now much of this is handled through GPS and automated systems, increasing

However, even with all the advancements, there's still no substitute for human oversight. Decisions and problem-solving on the jobsite remain critical since not everything can be predicted.

Communication is highly important. The best construction

technology while also being effective communicators. Without both sets of skills, success in transportation construction management can be limited.

WHAT ARE THE MOST CRITICAL SKILLS FOR TRANSPORTATION PROFESSIONALS TODAY, AND HOW CAN COMPANIES ATTRACT TALENT FROM NON-TRADITIONAL BACKGROUNDS?

The most critical skills for new talent start with strong communication skills, curiosity, and adaptability. Foundational skills like math, writing, and the ability to read and visualize renderings are transforming how professionals approach these tasks. The ability to review schedules and assess project timelines is another key competency.

Attracting talent from non-traditional backgrounds requires employers to keep an open mind. We've had success by focusing on traits like willingness to learn, teamwork, and


The most important thing companies can do now is focus on attracting and recruiting talent that has the curiosity and adaptability to grow with these changes. It's crucial to hire individuals who possess the traits needed to tackle the challenges of tomorrow, and to continuously provide them with opportunities to learn and develop. This includes offering

to help employees keep evolving throughout their careers.

Furthermore, the ability to adapt to various project delivery methods — such as the rise in design-build projects alongside the traditional bid-build approach — will be essential for the

team members will help them navigate the ongoing evolution of project methods in the industry.

And a positive, curious, can-do attitude will always be valuable in this industry.

workforce challenges we face, the key is fostering an environment where people can grow, adapt, and thrive as technology and industry demands continue to evolve. By focusing on hiring adaptable talent now and offering them the tools and opportunities to continuously learn, companies will be better positioned to meet the workforce needs of the future. 



About the Author

Kevin Boccock leads MBP's program management and construction management services in the transportation market sector. He began his career 29 years ago and joined MBP upon graduation from college as an entry level engineer. Kevin has worked on everything from small locally administered projects all the way up to large multi-billion dollar programs using traditional design-bid-build, design-build, and Public Private Partnership (P3) delivery methods.

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