

Member Communication Experience

The Talent Shortage

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law this past November. The question remains: How can the construction industry fulfill demand and provide quality work without quality workers?

Construction Executive talked to leaders across the industry about the challenges of the talent shortage and how construction can evolve to overcome them.

BEYOND THE GREAT RESIGNATION

The workforce shortage is more complicated than employees across industries and sectors preferring to work from home after nearly two years of lockdown conditions. The mass exodus of the "Great Resignation" doesn't indicate growing



social comfortability with unemployment; retirement, a demand for higher pay and better benefits have also driven the discussion.

But none of these factors is singly responsible for the worker shortage afflicting construction in particular. "There is a lack of education," says Tony Rader, vice president of sales for National Roofing Partners in Dallas, "about what is offered in the construction industry"—including connections to universities, competitive pay rates, opportunities for certification in tandem with higher education, steady hours, and even off-site jobs. That said, the internal analysis is less about why people aren't interested in construction and more about what the lack of skilled workers is doing to the industry, including:

Creating backlogs: "Over the past year, we have had to turn down projects and opportunities due to a lack of manpower," says Matthew Schimenti, president of Schimenti Construction

Company in New York City. "The shortage of talent is impacting us onsite and in the office, creating an urgent need for trained professionals who know how to navigate the industry and provide top service."

Contractors are faced with a catch-22. Pre- and early-pandemic, they dreaded a dwindling backlog, with projects threatening to run out completely in 2020. (Associated Builders and Contractors' Construction Backlog Indicator was at its lowest point in November 2020; following a steady period of recovery, it dropped again in August 2021.) Now, with projects up and running in tandem with the infrastructure bill, contractors find themselves in high demand but lacking the staff to sign onto projects. "There are companies with the largest backlog they've ever had," Rader says, "but they can't get materials right now, so the work is being shoved to next year."

This has the potential to further exacerbate internal skills gaps. "I've heard of three large firms that have laid off some individuals just because of their backlogs," says Rader, who served as national chair of ABC in 2019 and is familiar with the ebb and flow of economic issues, including how acts of Congress can lead to a balancing act. In the case of the infrastructure bill, while the legislation is meant to create jobs for the industry—and to improve the nation's decades-old infrastructure—it has a flaw when considered within the

- » Sponsoring scholarships for college-bound seniors intending to pursue careers in the design and construction industry.

Funck likewise

including at companies like HWH. "We need to provide more construction industry education, exposure, and experiences



About the Article

Written by Rachel E. O'Connell, Assistant Editor, Construction Executive.

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