

VOLUME 9 ISSUE NO. 3 — MAY/JUNE 2024

MERIT SHOP CONTRACTOR

WISCONSIN

**IMPORTANT ELEMENTS
OF MERIT SHOP CULTURE**

**REALITIES AND SOLUTIONS
LEADING THE MODERN
WORKFORCE**

MAKING
MENTAL HEALTH
MANAGEABLE

**THROUGH THE
EYES OF APPRENTICES**

THE WORKPLACE

ISSUE

**BUILDING TOMORROW:
CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY'S TALENT LANDSCAPE**

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Merit Shop Contractor Wisconsin is published six times annually by Associated Builders and Contractors of Wisconsin, Inc. (ISSN# 10642978)
5330 Wall St., Madison, WI 53718. Periodicals Postage Paid, Madison, WI and other additional mailing offices. (UPS 340-650). Subscription price is \$50 per year.

President and Publisher: John Mielke
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FROM OUR PRESIDENT

New workforce resources from ABC of Wisconsin



MY INTERACTIONS WITH MEMBERS OVER THE YEARS HAS GIVEN ME A FIRM GRASP OF THE MANY CHALLENGES CONTRACTORS FACE. One of the biggest challenges is maintaining a strong workforce, especially with a tight labor market and many baby boomers retiring. This challenge becomes even greater when labor unions are attempting to strip your employees away by claiming higher wages and benefits.


This workforce issue of the *Wisconsin Merit Shop Contractor* magazine is the appropriate time to remind you of two new resources that have been made available to our chapter members to both prevent and respond to this threat: the Total Compensation and Benefits Statement and the Triage Kit.

The Total Compensation and Benefit Statement is a tool developed to provide you with a template to calculate and share the direct and indirect compensation (salary and benefits) employees receive. This is a valuable piece that could help counter wage figures union representatives often throw out to entice merit shop employees away from their employers. It includes things like insurance, retirement, vehicles, education and training, and other benefits, in addition to wages. It provides employees with a more complete picture of their compensation.

The Triage Kit is a step-by-step tool that can guide the conversation with an employee who may be close to leaving your company. It includes a flow chart so when you determine why the employee is considering leaving, e.g. compensation, culture, management, etc., you have strategies for addressing each reason.

Each of these are available in the members only section of the website or by contacting ABC of Wisconsin. I would like to thank the chapter Human Resources Committee for its work on these items. This group deserves high praise for answering the call by our board of directors and chapter leadership to meet this need.

In the future, we will be adding other useful resources that can be used to educate employees on “why we are merit shop” and “some things you may not know about labor unions” that could be used to accompany these documents. Like the documents mentioned above, the various components of these documents will be important to share with employees as a retention strategy or in response to employees who may be considering leaving your company.

As always, ABC of Wisconsin is interested in providing you with unique services to alleviate some of your biggest challenges so you can effectively run your companies. 

— John Mielke, President

“
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THE
WORKFORCE
ISSUE



By Holly Jones
Dave Jones, LLC

IMPORTANT ELEMENTS OF MERIT SHOP CULTURE

The health of your organization is directly connected to the health of the people within.

Your company culture requires constant nurturing and cultivating. It is not something that you arrive at one day and are content. It must always be front and center.

I have seen our culture change throughout the years. When I look back to when I first started, we did not have training or onboarding or a good process to ensure we were hiring ideal team players. Early on, we did not have a particularly good work life balance as the company was growing very rapidly at that time. Little did I know just how much our culture would change and how those elements would be crucial to our success.

Our company does not have all the answers, but we have figured out some especially important things. We believe if

we have a healthy culture, most of the other things, like great customer service, will happen naturally on their own. There are many different elements to that. So, when I think of what it means to have a healthy merit shop culture, it means treating team members as family. That is the first and foremost priority at Dave Jones. We also practice servant leadership from the top down.

It all begins with open and transparent communication. Prioritizing the well-being of team members and making sure that we are giving them the resources and tools they need to succeed.

Creating a sense of belonging with team members can be challenging, but it is important to earn their trust and

IDEAL TEAM PLAYERS ARE HUMBLE, HUNGRY, AND SMART.

HUMBLE ■ To be humble means no big egos, so no arrogant or self-centered team members. These are individuals who define success collectively rather than individually and understand everyone on the team deserves respect regardless of title or status.

HUNGRY ■ Hungry workers are hard workers. Hungry and hard workers who do whatever is necessary to help the team succeed. They are passionate about their work, are results driven and never have to be pushed to get their work done. They are constantly thinking about the next steps and opportunities to get things done.

SMART ■ To be smart means to be people smart or emotionally intelligent. These individuals have interpersonal awareness and build trust with others. They are empathetic and apologize when necessary. They genuinely care about co-workers, ask good questions, and engage in productive discussions.

How do you know if you have developed a healthy culture within your organization? There are several signs or indicators for this. Morale is high and turnover drops. Teammates start referring friends and family to your company. Pride in their work is reflected in customer satisfaction. Individuals have a genuine care for others, and they have fun with each other. The team also embraces change and employees are empowered to make decisions.

With a little work on your merit shop culture, you end up with “culture keepers” on staff who maintain and promote the positive values of your organization. The effort pays off as the quality of work improves, jobsites are safer, customers and team members are happier, and the overall reputation of your company is enhanced.

allow them to be vulnerable. It is important that people are passionate about their work, growing and moving in the same direction and understanding how their work impacts the company and the communities we live and work in. Teamwork is also very important. Facilitate a workplace where people can work in a team and work well together and also provide personal and professional growth; really investing in your people.

There are three elements that are important for team members in your merit shop culture:

■ Psychological safety

Do team members feel safe expressing themselves? If someone makes a mistake, are they afraid to tell you about it? Do they want to hide it, or is there trust and vulnerability there?

What about a disagreement? Is the trust and vulnerability there to work through a disagreement or get help with questions? Can they be themselves as well? Expressing individuality and being themselves is also extremely important.

■ Common goals

Do your team members understand how their expertise and responsibilities contribute to the team’s overall performance and success? That is really important to people, especially the younger generation, to understand the impact of their work on their communities.

Do your team members get proper feedback in their roles? It is really important that people receive timely feedback outside of an annual performance review.

How are they compensated? Contractors have been under extreme wage/benefit pressure in the last couple of years, but that is important to them.

Do they feel valued? Value means different things to different people. Sometimes it is monetary. For some people, sometimes it is recognition that people want to feel valued, and we need to understand how they feel valued.

Do they feel connected to their teams? That sense of belonging is important to people who want to know that they are part of the company.

Are there opportunities to advance? We all know there is a time and place for opportunities. But when they become available, do they see people within the organizations getting that opportunity to advance?

■ Pro-social purpose

Do team members know the purpose of their work? This is important again, for the younger generation coming in. They need to understand why they are doing their work. In construction,

they need to be reminded they are building places where people are entertained, sleep, do business, shop, etc.

Do team members know who their work is serving? Similar to the previous point, do team members know they are making a valuable contribution to the community by producing work that positively impacts others? This can be very motivating for people.

Are team members encouraged to be themselves and express individuality? It is important that we allow our company to encourage that.

Much of what drives culture is leadership style, which starts at the top of the organization and runs through it. Are you a servant style leader, where you are serving your teams, or are you just the boss?

Consider engaging in some kind of exercise, such as a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analysis to determine what is good about your company culture and some things that need to be changed. Do not assume you know what your team is thinking. A lesson that I have learned over the years is that you have to talk to people to understand what they want and what they need. You cannot just be making rules and policies you think are in the best interest of your people.

A healthy merit shop culture also comes from hiring the right people who fit the culture and will not disrupt the team. It is important to emphasize the need for bringing ideal players onto the team. To that point, there are a number of tips for cultivating and protecting your culture:

- Hire the right people, let the wrong ones go.
- Merit pay - know your numbers.
- Training - for personal and professional growth; invest in your people.
- Recognition - praise your people; ask what this means to them.
- Do the right thing - actions must be genuine, heartfelt and in the best interest of everyone; hold the team accountable for doing what is right. [ABC Wisconsin](#)

Holly Jones is the Chief Culture Officer at Dave Jones, LLC, an ABC member mechanical subcontractor for performing plumbing, HVAC, fire protection and electrical products and services based out of Monona, WI near Madison.



EVENT REMINDERS



- **MEMBER LUNCHEON**
May 7, Grafton
- **PLAN & SPECIFICATIONS READING**
May 9 & 10, Madison
- **MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS WITH ABC - WELLNESS WEBINAR**
May 15, Online
- **APPRENTICESHIP GRADUATION BANQUET**
May 16, Wisconsin Dells
- **FOREMAN FUNDAMENTALS**
May 17, Pewaukee
- **MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS WITH ABC - WELLNESS WEBINAR**
May 22, Online
- **FIRST AID/CPR TRAINING**
May 28, Green Bay
- **MILWAUKEE BREWERS TAILGATE & GAME**
May 31, Milwaukee (Sold out)
- **10-HOUR OSHA TRAINING**
May 31 & June 7, Milwaukee
- **GOLF SCRAMBLE AT THE OAKS**
June 5, Cottage Grove (Sold out)
- **FIRST AID/CPR TRAINING**
June 7, Madison
- **FIRST AID/CPR TRAINING**
June 14, Fond du Lac
June 14, Eau Claire
- **NUCA COMPETENT PERSON TRAINING FOR EXCAVATION**
June 21, Madison
- **TIMBER RATTLERS GAME**
June 27, Appleton
- **QUALIFIED RIGGER & CRANE SIGNAL PERSON TRAINING**
June 27, Milwaukee
- **FIRST AID/CPR TRAINING**
June 28, Milwaukee



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By Joe Kiedinger

*REALITIES AND
SOLUTIONS*

LEADING

MODERN WORK

There has rarely been a more opportune time in the contracting world for great leaders to step up and take the reins. With topics like employee engagement, talent retention, and proper work-life balance coming at the forefront of discussion in recent years, it's clear that employees and job seekers are starting to expect more of their employers, and that's a good thing. Leaders have an opportunity to rise to the challenge, meet

those demands, and make a measurable difference for their people and for their organization.

Gone are the days of people sticking with their jobs even when they are dissatisfied. Employees have made it loud and clear that the old status quo is no longer acceptable with recent trends like the Great Resignation and quiet quitting. Shock crises like COVID-19 and persistent problems like inflation have intro-

duced a lot of stressors and extra frustration into people's lives, on top of their day-to-day responsibilities and struggles. Flexibility, fulfillment, and opportunities to advance at work quickly went from niceties to necessities for many people.

These realities are especially true in the construction industry, where labor shortages and turnovers are reported as a nearly universal



EMPLOYEES HAVE MADE IT LOUD AND CLEAR THAT THE OLD STATUS QUO IS NO LONGER ACCEPTABLE WITH RECENT TRENDS LIKE THE GREAT RESIGNATION AND QUIET QUITTING.

ING THE FORCE

problem. According to one construction industry survey, 91% of contractors have reported trouble in trying to fill positions. Putting that into perspective is something to behold – for every contractor that isn’t struggling to fill a position, there are over nine contractors that are.

Across all industries, employers have been called upon to adapt, construction contractors included. The labor market is like any other mar-

ket – those that adapt to its conditions thrive, and those that don’t struggle. The unfortunate reality is – some organizations are much better equipped to adapt than others. Those that have more resources at their disposal and bigger networks have largely been able to weather the storm and figure things out.

But there is one element that makes all organizations equal, especially in this regard – people. Organizations are ultimately made up of people, from the smallest local contractors to the most profitable international corporations in the world. Although the playing field might be skewed in many ways, people are the inescapable equalizing factor.

Solving problems starts with a person – a leader, coming forward and making a decision to stick to a certain path, no matter how difficult it may be. Changes and adaptations are never easy – it takes a committed and well-informed leader to go through with it. Those who are not up to the task will fall behind, and their organizations will fall behind as a result. Here’s the thing – it’s entirely possible for a small construction contractor to provide a superior standard of living for their employees and enjoy healthier numbers across the board compared to a large

company in a cozy industry, and it all starts with one good leader.

Although specific applications may vary, the core principles of what modern employees and job seekers are looking for remain mostly the same across all industries. As a leader in construction, there are plenty of things that you can do to start making a difference for your workforce. Here are three essential ways to get started:

1 Build a culture of dignity and respect

Here’s one thing that will be true of all people, all the time. People want to be treated with dignity. They want to be honored and respected, not just because of what they do, but because of who they are. People want to be in environments that fulfill them and build them up and avoid being in environments that make them feel bad about themselves.

As a leader, here some things that you can do to start building a culture of dignity and respect in your workforce:

- Set clear boundaries for yourself and for your team on what is and isn’t an acceptable interaction.
- Build trust with your team by showing a healthy level of vulnerability.
- Set an expectation that team members treat each other the way that they want to be treated.
- Ensure that conflict is resolved calmly and productively so that it doesn’t devolve.
- Teach the importance of emotional intelligence and its practical applications in the jobsite.
- Recognize and reward employees – don’t let good deeds go unnoticed or unappreciated.

Your goal should be to have employees look forward to coming to the jobsite, rather than dreading it. At the end of the day, work is work, and things have to be done whether we like to do it or not. But, when people have a full day of fulfilling interactions to look forward to, they’ll have a positive attitude even when the work is tough. That kind of environment is hard to beat.

2 Provide mentorship, development, and growth opportunities

Job seekers and employees naturally gravitate towards environments where they know that they can grow their skillset and contribute more. Contract workers, like any others, have bills to pay, families to feed, and love to take on opportunities to contribute more to a greater good and make their mark on the world.

Contractors can provide apprenticeships for incoming employees, training and education for current employees, and future opportunities for outstanding employees to enjoy lower turnover

THE WORKFORCE ISSUE

rates across the board. Allowing employees to hone and expand their skillset opens up a lot of doors for both the employee and their employer.

Through an apprenticeship program, incoming employees have a clear-cut path to understanding everything about their craft before they start applying it full-time. The employer, in turn, reaps all the benefits of having their positions filled with skilled employees that are more capable of sticking to standards, more likely to overperform, and less likely to underperform.

Training and education for current employees can provide opportunities for them to expand their skillsets, grow their careers, and learn valuable hard skills AND soft skills. When employees learn, they are empowered to solve their own problems and be better prepared for the next step in their career. For example, skills training at various levels can make all the difference for an ambitious up-and-comer looking to grow their career and make their mark. Leadership training can help an incoming, inexperienced, or struggling leader connect with their team, turn over better performance, and maintain their position. Communication training can help people figure out how to resolve conflicts in a healthy and productive way, reducing their frustrations at work.

More qualified workers that are invited to take the initiative and grow will find ways to contrib-

ute to the company's success in ways that you might not expect. You, as a leader, can be more comfortable providing internal opportunities for career growth when you know that your people are either qualified for the position or can be trained up to it. And when employees know that opportunities for growth are ripe in a company, they will stick around to pursue them.

❶ Be flexible – provide a healthy work-life balance

As a leader, would you want all of your time to be consumed by worrying about work? Do you want to be stuck at the jobsite working required overtime? Do you want to be responding to work calls and emails when you're trying to spend time with your family? Do you want to be so exhausted after work that you can't do anything after work? How about being randomly called into work off your schedule and without warning?

The likelihood is that your answer to all of those questions is a no. If it isn't a no – it should be! A healthy work-life balance is incredibly important to living a low-stress and fulfilling life. When you're stressed and occupied with your work all the time, it takes a toll on your mind and body. It leads to burnout, leaving you more susceptible to physical issues ranging from fatigue to respiratory issues, and mental issues ranging from irritability to depression.


Construction workers face a multitude of unfortunate realities that are unlike those seen in any other industry, with suicide rates over twice that of other professions and gradually growing each year. A lot of it has to do with excessive stress and pressure over the course of long hours. In this industry, providing a healthy work-

life balance isn't just keeping an employee at your company or improving a number, it's about saving lives.

As a leader, here are some steps that you can take to set the standard for work-life balance in your company:

- Lead by example. Make your work-life balance a priority and demonstrate that it's okay for others to do so as well.
- Set realistic expectations. Don't overburden employees.
- Provide ample paid time off for vacations and family time.
- Be flexible and understanding if an employee can't come into work for a legitimate reason like an emergency, appointment, or sickness.
- Educate employees on the importance of mental health, provide mental health benefits and resources for those in need.
- Practice transparency and provide predictability.
- Maintain adherence to accountability standards and expectations so that work is done when it's supposed to be, not after.

Prioritizing a healthy work-life balance will show your employees that you care for them not just as assets, but as people. They will appreciate the flexibility, space, and boundaries that you set and know that you have their best interests in mind. Meanwhile, your company will enjoy healthier performance as productivity increases as a result of your efforts.

It's time for leaders to rise to the occasion and make a difference for their people. The modern workforce has modern expectations, and by rising to meet them, leaders can position their company for long term success. With flexibility, growth opportunities, and an outstanding culture, your organization will be hard to beat in the labor market. 



Joe Kiedinger is an executive coach and CEO of Dignify, a leadership technology company focused on building healthy company cultures and confident leaders. Dignify has patented technology to help leaders navigate a

significant part of the challenge outlined above by providing a platform to create and maintain a culture of dignity in an organization.

You can email Joe at joek@dignify.com or visit <https://learn.dignify.com/construction/>.



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ABC of Wisconsin earns four awards at National Craft Championships

ABC of Wisconsin electrical apprentice earns gold; carpentry apprentice earns silver; commercial team wins bronze; UW-Stout construction management team earns gold in Estimating.



Nathan Myers from NSI Electrical Contractors (center with medal) earns a gold in the Electrical trade competition.



Commercial team from Wisconsin wins bronze. From left to right are Alex McDermott of Dave Jones, Jessica Milan of Corporate Contractors, Inc. (CCI), David Marweg of Southport Engineered Systems, LLC, and Teagan Cornell of PDC Electrical Contractors.



Students from the construction management program at UW-Stout earned a gold in the Estimating portion of the Construction Management Competition.



Timothy Gittel of AMSCI (center with medal) earns a silver award in the Carpentry trade category.



Charlie Vine, W.D.S. Construction, Inc. (carpentry apprentice graduate), Jessica Milan Corporate Contractors, Inc. (CCI) (carpentry apprentice graduate), Alexander McDermott, Dave Jones (plumbing apprentice graduate), and Steven Braun, Suburban Enterprises, Inc. (electrical apprentice graduate).

THROUGH THE EYES OF APPRENTICES

Perspectives on the ABC of Wisconsin Apprenticeship program

By Chrissy Long
ABC of Wisconsin Marketing & Communications Manager

Amidst the bustling energy of SuperCon, we had the privilege of sitting down with ABC of Wisconsin apprentice graduates representing diverse trades, genders, and ages. The insightful conversations highlighted the pride, passion, and impact of the ABC of Wisconsin Apprenticeship program. Their stories serve not only as inspiration but as testimonials to recruit new individuals to join the ranks of the construction workforce.

Q: Tell us your story about how you got into the apprenticeship and why you chose it.

A: Steve – I worked in a factory, the same factory, same place for 23 years, and I just wanted more for myself and for my family. I met an individual who was an electrical journeyman. He

said it wasn't too late. So, at the age of 49, I quit my job and started the apprenticeship with Suburban Electric and had an amazing time. I was scared, for sure to start all over, but I had great instructors. They understood what I was going through. It was a great experience and I think that it's [apprenticeship] an untapped resource. There's a lot of people out there that are stuck in dead end jobs, but you just want something that you can hang your hat on and say I'm proud to be an electrician.

A: Alex – I was actually introduced to the plumbing industry when I was still in high school. I took a lot of shop classes because I liked school, but I just figured the four-year typical college degree wasn't for me. So then in one of my shop classes, Dave Jones came into our classroom and did a whole PowerPoint spiel of all the different divisions. They had the op-

portunities, they introduced the apprenticeship program through ABC, which obviously it really sparked an interest in my head. So, as kids who like to work with their hands, not your traditional just history or language arts or what have you, I was really grateful for that opportunity.

A: Jessica – I realized that I wanted to join construction in high school. But it wasn't my first choice. My first choice was going to a four-year college, going the financial route, becoming an accountant, but I had to take a woodshop course to complete the credits I needed to graduate high school. I took the woodshop course and fell in love with it and knew I loved woodworking, but I didn't know how to get started. CCI came to my high school to talk to me and my mom. My mom was very hesitant when I told her that I wanted to be a carpenter in construction. CCI stood there by me; introduced

me to the apprenticeship program and ABC as well. They were with me through the entire thing when I graduated in May of 2023.

Q: Share what it was like in your personal experience going through the program.

A: Steve – Apprenticeship was an amazing experience. It was well taught. I have instructors that are now friends of mine because we had such a strong relationship going through it.

A: Alex – I was just out of high school when I was eligible for the program and I got right in and to be honest, it wasn't what I thought it was going to be. You have a lot of school, but you also get a lot of on-the-job training and hours you have to record. The bottom line is you need to be determined. This isn't just your mission, it's your career. This is your future. It really helped me grow more mature in being able to communicate and being able to take constructive criticism and try to get better every single day. So overall, it was a blast and it really shaped me to who I am right now.

Q: How did your family take it?

A: Alex – My family was supportive. Both my parents were like, go for it. But the thing is, don't



FOCUS ON BEING THE BEST THAT YOU CAN BE EVERY SINGLE DAY AND ASK QUESTIONS.

*Alexander McDermott,
Dave Jones*

start what you can't finish. So, if you're going to do this, you're going to do the whole thing. They were super supportive. I couldn't have done it without them.

A: Jessica – I had a mom that was very against me, becoming a carpenter. But what she did like about ABC and CCI, was that they had everything lined up for me ready to go. They gave me an email saying, "Here are your classes, hotel's already booked, just show up, do what you got to do." My mom really appreciated that because she didn't have to worry about what I was going to be doing while I'm away from home.

Q: If you could go back to your first day, what would be some advice that the employers could give their apprentices entering their first day?

A: Jessica – My advice for apprentices starting the program is don't be scared. Everyone's willing to help you out if you need anything.

A: Alex – Don't be scared and be ready to ask questions. Don't think you know it all. You're never going to perfect your craft the first day or the first month or the first year. Heck, I'm still working on my craft, and you can always get better. Focus on being the best that you can be every single day and ask questions, because you will be a great employee and just overall a great craftsman if you do that.

A: Steve – Enjoy the experience. You're going to make relationships with not only your classmates, but also with your coworkers. Enjoy the overall experience with all the people you're going to meet.

Q: How well do you feel that the ABC apprenticeship program prepared you?

A: Steve – My ABC apprenticeship was amazing. The technical part in the classroom was spot on. The company you work for is very important to make sure that they're giving you the opportunity to check all your boxes for all the different scenarios. I didn't want to miss out on the opportunity for my future career path that if I wanted to do more commercial, residential, or industrial. I wanted to touch all those bases. And if they wouldn't have provided me that opportunity, that would have been a failure. So, the cooperation between the employer and ABC was spot on.

A: Alex – I felt very well prepared. The instructors were great. The resources if we had questions were great. However, for being in the field, and knowing what you're doing on site and being prepared for whatever project is presented to you depends on the employer. It depends on what they're doing and making sure the employer is making sure you are progressing. ABC was where it needed to be. I felt like they were very proficient.

Q: What would be one thing that you would highlight about your employer that is unique?

A: Jessica – I like CCI because of their values. I look forward going to work. I look forward to seeing all the guys. And I feel like I didn't have that same feeling with other companies when I did all the job shadows. So that's what caught my attention with CCI. I feel like you can tell when you walk in the door with an employer that they are going to be invested in their apprentices.

Q: Jessica, can you share more about how CCI helped alleviate your mom's reservations about you pursuing a career in the trades?

A: Jessica – I told my mom I want to be a carpenter. For months she told me not to do it. When I was in high school, I was told trades was the last resort. Go to college. Get your degree, be better. But I haven't met better people than in construction. These guys are my brothers. I know if I have a flat tire, they're going to help me fix it. And I tried to convince my mom to give me a chance. I want to be a carpenter. I want to do construction. I went to my guidance counselor, and they reached out to a company called CareerTek that reaches out to construction companies to help students find a good fit for them. And they reached out to CCI. Then after that they had a meeting. My mom brought in a notebook filled with questions. We were probably in that room for maybe two hours. By the end of that meeting, we had a long talk about what was going to happen and what I wanted



AT THE AGE OF 49, I QUIT MY JOB AND STARTED THE APPRENTICESHIP WITH SUBURBAN ELECTRIC AND HAD AN AMAZING TIME.

*Steven Braun,
Suburban Enterprises, Inc.*



I LIKE CCI BECAUSE OF THEIR VALUES. I LOOK FORWARD GOING TO WORK.

Jessica Milan,
Corporate Contractors, Inc.

to do. My mom said, "Okay, I still don't want you to do it, but they kind of eased some of my worries." And to this day, she didn't think I was going to last more than three months and I'm on my sixth year of being a carpenter. Once I walked off that stage, she was very proud of me for what I did. And she apologized because she said if I had listened to her, I wouldn't be where I am right now.

Q: Now that you have been through the program, what opportunities have opened up for you in your careers?

A: Alex – Being in the construction industry you learn how to do other projects around the house. You're always learning, and I think that's why I really like it. The other opportunities I've gotten includes being a leader. I never thought that I could develop into being a leader. When you become a foreman and you're in charge of all these guys you have to develop a leadership aspect and when you get through the apprenticeship and you're a journeyman there are opportunities to become a foreman to run the show. I'm learning how to channel my leadership and also grow and then also bring others up around me. I never thought I'd be doing that.

A: Jessica – I have the opportunity to advocate for the trades, doing a lot of community events. I'm also heading to Florida to compete nationally at the National Craft Championships. And I keep taking on more responsibilities at work.

A: Steve – I got over my fear of going to school. I'm now pursuing my associate degree. I'm going back to school to do the next chapter. Mentoring the younger apprentices is amazing. I love that opportunity. And that it's not only about how to strip wire, it's about, are you contributing to your 401K? Watch out for your future. Don't make the same mistakes I've

made. There's just a ton of opportunities once you get your card. Advocating for the trades is such a great opportunity for a younger person; especially to come out with no huge debt and to have an amazing career that you can support your family with and have that opportunity.

A: Charlie – Looking back on my own personal experiences, I never thought that I'd be sitting in this chair. I never thought that I'd be running a \$3 million division at 29 years old. It goes back to without ABC and the apprenticeship program. Without the people that I've surrounded myself within this program and within this industry, I wouldn't be where I am today.

Q: Alex, can you expand on youth apprenticeship?

A: Alex – When you're a senior in high school, if you want to, you can go to work, and go to school at the same time; you're called a youth apprentice. You get a little jumpstart and then when you're full-time, you already have a reputation built with the company to become an apprentice.

A: Steve – On the jobsite, I worked with a few youth apprentices, and I really admired that they could get up and show up on my site at 5:30 in the morning, work until noon, and then go to school, and then come back the next day and never be late. I gained a lot of respect and I really thought that this would be difficult for them. I know when I was a senior in high school, there was no way I was going to get up at five o'clock, to show up to a jobsite. And these guys



I NEVER THOUGHT THAT I'D BE RUNNING A \$3 MILLION DIVISION AT 29 YEARS OLD.

Charlie Vine,
W.D.S. Construction

really knocked it out of the park because it's what they wanted to do; they were invested. So, I think it's a great opportunity for them.


Q: In closing, what was your favorite part of the apprenticeship?

A: Steve – My favorite part of the apprenticeship was all the relationships I've made with the instructors, my classmates, and my coworkers through ABC. Michael McDonald was a big influence; it's just been a really amazing experience.

A: Alex – My favorite part of apprenticeship is the relationships, the people who helped you get through and everything that comes with those memories. And obviously making money as a young person is great. Besides that, it has turned me into who I am today. It's been a very great journey so far.

A: Jessica – My favorite part of the apprenticeship was the relationships in the classroom and outside the classroom. I had just as much fun outside the classroom as inside the classroom. You will always have these bonds for your entire career.

In conclusion, these testimonials provide invaluable insights into the numerous benefits of the ABC of Wisconsin apprenticeship program. Beyond merely providing a career path, apprenticeships signify the beginning of a journey towards leadership, fostering valuable relationships, and forging lifelong bonds. Each narrative resonates the notion that apprenticeships offer more than just a job—they pave the way for a fulfilling a prosperous career journey full of opportunities for personal growth and professional development.

"These apprenticeship experiences serve as tools for attracting and inspiring the next generation of the construction workforce, shaping a brighter future for both individuals and the industry as a whole," said Leigh Emrick, ABC of Wisconsin Apprenticeship Director. "We really take pride in all our graduates. It's why we do what we do." 



*SCAN QR CODE FOR FULL SESSION VIDEO RECORDING

For more information on ABC of Wisconsin's apprenticeship program, please visit BuildYourCareerWI.org

MAKING **MENTAL** **HEALTH**

By Trent Cummings
LAK Group

MANAGEABLE

The construction industry is renowned for its resilience in the face of tough challenges, yet historically, it often has overlooked the well-being of its most vital asset: its workers. A bitter truth - If you're rolling your eyes on the topic, you might be part of why only 17% of industry workers would openly discuss their mental health issues with a supervisor.

Amidst the hustle and bustle of construction sites, where long hours and physically demanding tasks are the norm, the mental health of workers can often be neglected. While physical signs of distress are readily apparent,

mental health struggles may lurk beneath the surface, masked by a prevailing culture that values toughness and stoicism. However, addressing mental health in the construction sector is a matter of consistent effort to foster a safe, collaborative, and productive workforce.

One of the key advantages of promoting mental well-being is its positive impact on employee morale and engagement. When employees feel supported and valued by their employers, they are more likely to be motivated and enthusiastic about their work. On the other side, a lack of attention to mental health can

lead to disengagement, absenteeism, and high turnover rates, all of which can undermine organizational success.

A recent National Alliance on Mental Illness/Ipsos poll in January 2024 shed light on the mental health landscape within the construction industry. Shockingly, 15% of employees aged 18 to 29 rated their mental health as "somewhat poor," while only 35% of entry-level employees reported their mental health as "very good." These statistics underscore the urgent need for employers to prioritize mental health initiatives to support their workers effectively.





**ADDRESSING
MENTAL HEALTH IN
THE CONSTRUCTION
INDUSTRY GOES BEYOND
PROVIDING ACCESS TO
RESOURCES; IT REQUIRES
A FUNDAMENTAL SHIFT
IN ORGANIZATIONAL
CULTURE.**

One of the primary challenges in addressing mental health in the construction industry is the stigma surrounding seeking help. Construction workers, predominantly male (Bureau of Labor Statistics), often grapple with cultural taboos that discourage open discussions about mental health. Consequently, many workers may suffer in silence, hesitant to reach out for support for fear of being perceived as weak or vulnerable. This pervasive stigma impairs mental health issues and hinders efforts to create a supportive environment within construction companies.

To confront these challenges head-on,

employers should consider implementing a comprehensive mental health strategy that includes education, training, and support services. Providing employees with access to mental health resources, such as counseling services, peer support groups, and wellness programs, can help reduce stigma and encourage help-seeking behavior. Additionally, offering flexible work arrangements and promoting work-life balance can help alleviate stress and improve overall well-being. Collaborating with benefits providers, coaches, or even self-service applications is a crucial first

step. The language & approach you choose is vital. Employers must communicate this in a way of “these are resources for you” and not “we’re doing this to you.” By providing these services, employers can ensure their workers have a safe spot to communicate and readily available resources to address their stress & mental health needs.

Moreover, promoting these resources through various channels such as signage, employee handbooks, and supervisor training can help destigmatize seeking help for mental health issues. If leaders in the organization are

THE WORKFORCE ISSUE

openly participating, others are more likely to follow and buy-in. By fostering a culture that values and prioritizes mental health, employers can encourage open dialogue and create a supportive atmosphere where workers feel comfortable seeking assistance when needed.

However, addressing mental health in the construction industry goes beyond providing access to resources; it requires a fundamental shift in organizational culture. Leaders play a pivotal role in setting the tone for workplace culture and must lead by example by prioritizing mental health and well-being. This involves not only advocating for mental health support but also actively demonstrating empathy and understanding towards employees' struggles.

Positive strides have been made in recent years, with increased investment in education and training programs, to equip workers with the skills to recognize and address mental health issues. A Center for Workplace Mental Health survey showed that 77% of Presidents, CEOs, and Owners recognized as a priority addressing mental health at work by promoting awareness, helping to reduce stigma, and encouraging people to get help when needed.

Additionally, structured peer support networks have emerged, providing workers with opportunities to connect, share experiences, and offer mutual assistance.


Despite the progress, significant barriers to addressing mental health persist within the industry. Leadership biases, misconceptions about the cost and time involved in implementing mental health initiatives, and fear of repercussions continue to hinder progress. However, there will always be new barriers – just like a workplace culture, mental well-being initiatives are a living, breathing effort that continue to evolve with everyday experiences. Developing awareness, resources, and participation help those experiences become more positive over time.

From purely a business perspective, addressing mental health in the construction industry requires a consistent, multifaceted approach that provides access to resources, destigmatization efforts, and a shift in organizational culture. By prioritizing mental health and well-being, employers can create a supportive environment that fosters resilience, productivity, and overall employee satisfaction. The importance of mental well-being in the workplace cannot be overstated. Beyond the moral imperative of caring for employees' mental health, there are significant benefits to fostering a supportive and psychologically safe work environment. Research has consistently shown that prioritizing mental health in the workplace leads to higher employee satisfac-

tion, increased retention, and improved overall organizational performance. Other studies have found that for every dollar invested in mental health programs, companies see a return of \$1.50 to \$4.00 in improved productivity and reduced absenteeism and turnover. By proactively addressing mental health issues, employers can mitigate the financial costs associated with lost productivity and employee turnover, ultimately contributing to their bottom line.

Adding to it, promoting mental well-being fosters a culture of innovation and creativity within organizations. When employees feel psychologically safe to express their thoughts and ideas without fear of judgment or reprisal, they are more likely to contribute innovative solutions and drive organizational growth. By nurturing a work environment that values diverse perspectives and encourages open communication, employers can harness the full potential of their workforce and stay ahead of the competition.

From a community perspective, organizations that demonstrate a commitment to employee well-being enhance their reputation as employers of choice, attracting top talent and strengthening their position in the market. Moreover, by supporting employees' mental health, employers contribute to the overall health and resilience of society, helping to reduce the burden on healthcare systems and improve social outcomes.

In conclusion, prioritizing mental well-being in the workplace is not only the right thing to do but also makes good business sense. By investing in mental health initiatives, employers can create a supportive work environment that fosters employee retention, productivity, and innovation. By demonstrating a commitment to employee well-being, employers can enhance their reputation, attract top talent, and contribute to the overall health and resilience of society. As the construction industry continues to evolve, investing in mental health will be essential for building a healthier, more sustainable workforce for the future. 

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BUILDING TOMORROW: TRANSFORMING THE CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY'S TALENT LANDSCAPE

By **Dustin McClone**
The McClone Agency

The construction industry is facing a severe challenge, underscored by a staggering statistic: as of June 2023, there were 386,000 open construction jobs. This number isn't just a stark reminder of the ongoing 'war for talent'; it's a call for action. Over the last decade, the gap between job openings and the rate at which workers are quitting has widened, revealing a critical issue that's about more than just numbers—it's about the future of construction.

How did we get here? The reasons are many. Construction work can be physically demanding and often viewed unfavorably by younger generations who might otherwise fill the ranks of retiring skilled workers. These demographic shifts are creating a vacuum, and the industry's response has been multifaceted.

To tackle these challenges, the industry has turned to a variety of innovative strategies. Companies are not just improving their recruitment tactics; they're transforming them. They're reaching out through partnerships with educational institutions and career fairs designed to showcase the industry's opportunities. Training programs have been revamped to equip workers more quickly and effectively, and compensation packages have been enhanced to boost both recruitment and retention.

Yet, the traditional ways still persist. A recent study by Windapo shows that 52% of construction companies cling to pen and paper for essential tasks like estimating and bid management. It's clear that the push towards integrating more sophisticated technologies—automation, drones, robotics—is necessary not just for efficiency, but as a critical strategy to close the labor gap. But this technological shift isn't straightforward. Resistance from workers accustomed to traditional methods and the high costs of new technologies present substantial hurdles.

But perhaps the most significant impact can be made through leadership. An astonishing

70% of employee engagement is determined by direct supervisors. The construction industry needs to double down on developing strong leaders. Best practices in HR, robust training programs, and a culture that prioritizes clear communication and comprehensive compensation packages are crucial. These are not mere perks but strategic imperatives that can define a company's success in attracting and retaining talent.

Moreover, modernizing management practices could dramatically reduce turnover rates and stabilize the workforce. Addressing the root causes of dissatisfaction and disengagement is not just about improving efficiency—it's about creating a workplace that attracts and retains skilled workers.

As the industry stands at this critical crossroads, the path forward is clear. The current labor challenges offer a unique opportunity for transformation. By prioritizing strategic leadership, embracing cutting-edge technology, and fostering a supportive work environment, the best organizations are overcoming these challenges.

The strategies deployed today will shape the business you are tomorrow, influencing not only how we build but also who chooses to build. With a focus on people and technology, you can ensure a more stable, skilled, and

satisfied workforce, ready to tackle the challenges of the 21st century. As we look towards the future, it's clear that the foundations we lay now, both literal and metaphorical, will determine the resilience and success of the entire industry. [ABC Wisconsin](#)

Dustin McClone is President and CEO of the McClone Agency.



MARCH 2024

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Ann Fincutter

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 Watertown, WI 53094
 920-285-6754

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Summer Wittneben

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Eric Smith

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Brian Skelton

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Description: Contractor Member

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Doug Fromm

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Jeff Gray

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Joseph Wald

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Slava Krol

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• Knobelsdorff

Karl Von Knobelsdorff

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Description: Contractor Member

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Hannah Champion

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Robb Brinkmann

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Nick Weisensel

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