

By JOSEPH A. SCARCELLA

Who Will Fill Your Shoes?

If the walls and ceilings industry is to continue as a vital construction trade far into the new millennium, it must present itself as a viable career option to those entering the work force. It is important that generations of plasterers, lathers, drywallers, insulators, metal stud framers, fire-prooferers and the like are there to fill your shoes. The future of the trade depends on its leaders' abilities to prepare and train tomorrow's workforce.

Regrettably, the industry is presently losing qualified and experienced contractors, foremen and journeymen at alarming rates, and new recruits are just not available. This may ultimately result in the trade losing a generation of corporate professionals and contractors that can carry on the responsibilities that have been so diligently maintained to sustain the profession over the years.

With this in mind, issues such as recruitment alternatives need to be addressed to encourage high-caliber personnel to join the ranks of the walls and ceilings profession. Further, educational needs and training implications need to be discussed in order to train the next generation of contractors and mechanics.

Let's face it, the success of the industry depends on its members' ability to accurately plan its future. With this in mind, the following information is provided to promote introspection about employment needs of the trade.

Employment Forecast

The Occupational Outlook Handbook suggests employment in the walls and ceilings industry is forecasted to increase about as fast as the average of all occupations through 2005. In addition to job openings due to a rising demand for plaster work, additional job openings will open up as employees transfer to other occupations, retire, or leave the labor force. This growth is expected to continue as a result of greater appreciation for the durability,

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ty, quality of finish and attractiveness of the trade's materials.

By way of illustration, establishments with paid employees classified in the walls and ceilings industry accounted for approximately \$14.3 billion in total volume of business in 1995. Of this amount, about \$4.9 billion was paid out for equipment, materials, supplies, components and fuels. Acoustical contracting accounted for \$1.5 billion; drywall and metal framing totaled \$2.6 billion; insulation represented \$3.1 billion; lathing was \$505 million; plastering totaled \$1.4 billion; specialties added another \$750 million; and retail, wholesale, and other business related activities represented \$165 million.

Total employment for the walls and ceilings industry averaged 207,263 for the year, with a total payroll of \$4.9 billion. Value added for 1995 was \$8.2 billion. This was lower than industry standards due to the recession the nation faced in the 1980's. (Census of Construction Industry, 1995).

Apprenticeship and Training

Projections suggest our industry will be confronted with some serious labor shortages. An increased need of trade and industry education is essential. The walls and ceilings industry must better articulate its concerns for recruitment, training, and technical capability to the community. In addition, the trade must provide meaningful experiences for those interested in developing career opportunities in the trade. It is essential that every opportunity to help educational institutions at all levels understand the need for more highly skilled, knowledgeable employees is availed.

One of many problems faced in the walls and ceilings trade has been the lack of curriculum development, identified competencies, accredited training programs, and mechanisms to deliver training to the work force. Current curricula being used in the industry is outdated, while newer, more effective methods of instruction are not being implemented into current training practices. Curriculums used by the Associated General Contractors and Associated Builders and Contractors, for example, are focused on the general building trades. Little if anything is being done to develop competencies at all levels of the trade.

For example, the most current training standards found for the plastering industry are the National Apprenticeship Training Standards for Plastering. Last revised in 1982, these standards do not address any of the materials or construction methods introduced in the past 15 years, and further do not provide curriculum guidelines and criteria to assist in the delivery of a trade program. Only a scant outline of provisions of standards, hours of work for apprenticeship, duties and responsibilities are provided.

Trade Training

While training is not readily available for all levels of the walls and ceilings industry in the United States, too

much of what does exist is out of date. One explanation for this is that the industry is fragmented into two sectors, union and nonunion.

Nonunion contracting has been a major issue for the trade since the demise of union contractors in the 1980s. With their demise, much of the industry's training has been stifled. In addition, our industry's trades are not offered as programs of study in secondary or adult education vocational and technical schools. Primarily, these delivery systems structure their teaching around the general building trades, such as carpentry, electrical, plumbing, and sheet metal. Plastering, lath, drywall, steel stud framing, insulation, fireproofing, iron working, bricklaying and masonry are superficially discussed.

About 40 percent of training conducted in the plastering industry is through union apprenticeship programs, nearly all of the remaining 60 percent is conducted on-the-job in nonunion firms. One bright exception has been the contribution of the Plastering and Cement Masons Job Corps, which provides introductory training to roughly 400 plastering apprentices each year.

Advocating Change

Change is not an isolated process that occurs over night; it is a democratic process that occurs with time. It is a complex process that is not just built around literature, but around people. In order to make change, it is necessary to consider the effects from every angle. Each individual, business or organization is dependent upon one another. When change is implemented, each one of us will be affected.

Our attitudes regarding the direction of the plastering industry will have an impact on our behavior of future industry needs. These attitudes will influence the characteristics of the workforce and the context of industry standards.

It could be assumed and suggested that the driving force behind the profession is its members' collective ability to work together when planning, directing, organizing and controlling its strategies and administration to promote change. Advocating leadership and employment opportunities for the profession is a prelude toward effective two-way communication between its members and leaders of the organizations.

Final Word

Common sense would dictate, the more people know about the mission and direction of the walls and ceilings industry, the greater the opportunity there will be in finding new members to assume leadership roles in its visions. Leadership comes from many levels, in any organization or institution, and is not obliged to any one designation, status or class. It could be assumed that leadership potential exists wherever there is the possibility to impact others.

What moves any industrial organization is corporate leaders — contractors, corporate professionals, managers, administrators and the like. The more actively involved one is in an occupation's professional organizations, associations and bureaus, the more able change can occur. In the plastering industry, however, this leadership is fragmented. Although most people are wholeheartedly concerned and are ambitious for making change, without a unified, concerted leadership effort, progress will be slow in bringing order and stability to the profession nationally.

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