Strategies for recruiting and retaining tradeswomen

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Statistics show that for every four people leaving the construction industry, only one enters. With predictions as high as 1.9 million craft professionals needed by 2025, it is time to rethink the makeup of our workforce — not for the sheer numbers needed — but for building better teams and creating better work environments for everyone. That means overcoming obstacles that prevent women — the largest demographic percentage of our population — from joining the industry.

The National Center for Construction Education and Research (NCCER) recently released a research-based white paper that provides strategies for increasing participation and expediting the success of women in the trades.

The research is based on focus groups with 176 tradeswomen and analysis of 770 responses to a survey directed to women in the industry. The focus groups took place with women working for five contractors in the industrial and commercial sectors across the U.S. and Canada.

Making changes in the following areas would increase recruiting and retention of women in construction.

Address discrimination and sexual harassment

Sexual harassment is still identified as the number one issue in the field that construction leaders need to address. An effective place to start is by establishing and publishing a policy related to sexual harassment prevention that explicitly defines the organization's position and a transparent process for complaints.

Ensure consistent hiring practice

The women talked openly about the bias that exists in hiring practices, which makes getting hired more difficult. Several of the women talked about applying for craft positions and not receiving a response from the companies. As soon as they reapplied using gender-neutral names, like Chris instead of Christine, they were immediately contacted. It was also noted that knowing someone at the company was critical to getting hired. This type of policy makes it more difficult for new people to enter the industry who do not have connections.

Accommodate mothers

The third most frequently cited barrier by women in the construction industry is the lack of flexibility to care for families. A survey of 770 women in construction found that 25% of tradeswomen reported facing disciplinary action for missing work to attend to family emergencies. Whereas only 4% of women in managerial, administrative and technical positions reported being disciplined for missing work for similar reasons.

Provide training and enable women in leadership

Young girls are less likely to be exposed to career opportunities in construction than young boys. Women are also under-enrolled in construction CTE programs, so it is critical that companies provide training for women to succeed in the industry.

The research found that both women and their managers believe women have skill sets that match the characteristics companies look for in field leadership positions. A survey of 272 tradeswomen found that 57% have never had a female supervisor during their time in the industry. However, 69% of the same tradeswomen indicated that they wanted to be in a leadership position at some point in their career. This is a clear sign of a disconnect in the leadership pipeline.

Improve the jobsite experience

It is not as easy to make accommodations for women on a construction site as it is in an office environment; however, that does not mean that those same accommodations are not needed or should not be addressed in the field. The two areas the groups discussed the most were bathroom facilities equipped with feminine hygiene products and properly fitted and stylish workwear and equipment.

For more information, visit nccer.org. ●

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Build these three capacities for sustainable excellence

How much value does your safety systm produce? What about your leaders and culture? Does your organization have the capacity to produce sustainable excellence in safety performance?

After more than 20 years of leading companies across all major industries, I regularly find the organizations that continue to outperform their peers intentionally work to develop the capacity to achieve sustainable excellence. They focus on three areas: system capacity to prevent and recover, leadership capacity to align culture and systems and learn from deviations and cultural capacity to normalize desired beliefs, behaviors and experiences.

In most organizations, senior leadership makes decisions that are delegated down throughout the organizational chart. To protect the business and people within, the organization will create system capacity to prevent incidents and injuries. Simultaneously, great companies are purposeful about the unique culture needed and work to create common beliefs and behaviors. Because they are core to the company identity, even hiring and terminating occurs according to cultural values. Since 1986, safety culture has been a called out sub-element of the occupational culture.

Strategic efforts focusing on ensuring beliefs and behaviors specific to safety have also become common.
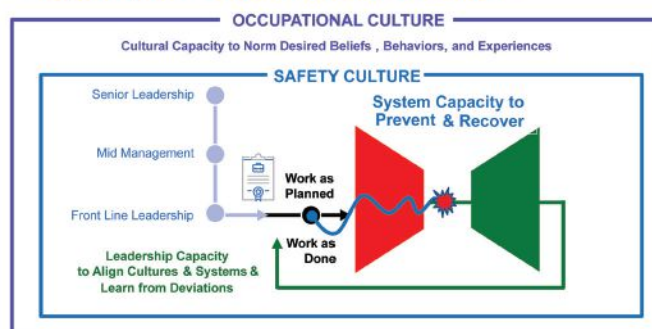
System capacity to prevent and recover

Despite systems to prevent unwanted events and a strong culture, work doesn't always go to plan. How work is planned is often different than how work is done. Every day, there are deviations from expectations and people will make mistakes in complex environments. Knowing this, great corporations create the capacity to recover when deviations and mistakes occur, minimizing the resulting severity and/or bringing the operations back to the pre-event state.

Leadership capacity

These great organizations invest in their leaders, especially on the front line, to have the competency and confidence to align their

Capacity for Sustainable Excellence

OCCUPATIONAL CULTURE
Cultural Capacity to Norm Desired Beliefs, Behaviors, and Experiences

SAFETY CULTURE

Senior Leadership
Mid Management
Front Line Leadership

System Capacity to Prevent & Recover

Work as Planned
Work as Done

Leadership Capacity to Align Cultures & Systems & Learn from Deviations

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teams and crews to the occupational and safety culture and the systems necessary to prevent and recover from unwanted events. To create a learning organization, these leaders understand what might produce an error-prone situation, and work to proactively seek out opportunities to learn from a deviation from expectations before they produce damage, incident or injury.

Cultural capacity

What people do when the boss is not around is an aspect of every occupational culture, as are the experiences new employees have after hiring and onboarding. Cultures of excellence work to acclimate new members to the written and unwritten rules and desired beliefs, behaviors and experiences; the tribe looks out for each other.

Considering this model, what is your confidence level in your system capacity to prevent events? What is your level of confidence in your system capacity to recover? How confident are you that your leaders are aligning cultures and systems and learning from deviations? And how effective is culture in aligning each member of the tribe, new or experienced?

Where are you with building these three vital capacities for sustainable excellence?

Shawn M. Galloway is CEO of ProAct Safety and an author of several bestselling books. His latest book is COACH: A Safety Leadership Fable. An award-winning consultant, trusted adviser, leadership coach and keynote speaker, he has helped hundreds of organizations within every primary industry to improve safety strategy, culture, leadership and engagement. He also hosts the highly acclaimed weekly podcast series Safety Culture Excellence®.

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