

by Bill Good



At our annual Midyear Meetings held July 12-16 in Chicago, NRCA leaders expressed their frustration with being able to find and keep qualified workers. This isn't a new development, of course, but as the economy continues to improve, the problem only gets worse. And the issue doesn't appear to be limited by geography; it's everywhere.

- The average age of an entry-level union apprentice roofing worker is about 30.
- According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, 57 percent of the roofing field workforce is Hispanic.
- The industry has a high rate of turnover in the first few months of employment.
- Workers who are injured on the job are most likely either to be new to the job or more than 45 years old.
- Current immigration policy makes it extremely difficult to hire people legally from outside the U.S.
- There are about 160,000 roofing workers in the U.S.; about 22,000 of them belong to the roofers union.
- According to surveys we've conducted (and validated by others), people entering the building trades expect to be trained and to have a clear, understandable career path.

Now, there are lots of conclusions that can be drawn from this, but it seems to me one is indisputable: We need to have a comprehensive, nationally recognized training program for roofing workers.

We are competing for labor, of course, with other building trades. And many of those other trades have well-established training programs

(think electricians, plumbers and sheet metal workers). We'll never be able to compete effectively if we can't at least match the competition.

The roofing industry does have some advantages. We know our workers value the opportunity to work outdoors. They like being able to see the results of their labor. And we offer tremendous opportunities for advancement for those willing to work hard. We ought to be selling those advantages. But we can't do so if we don't begin with a solid training program.

I'm happy to report an NRCA task force has been at work for more than a year developing what will become a significant national training program. It will be built on a train-the-trainer model, and trainers will be accredited. We'll also be developing content for the program—deliverable online, in training facilities and on the job. Importantly, the program will include accreditation and recognition for trainees along the way so we'll be developing, for example, certified single-ply installers and certified shingle installers. And safety, of course, will be a key component of all the training materials we develop.

We plan to begin rolling out the first set of training materials early next year. It's a long-term (and expensive) proposition, but one the industry desperately needs. It won't solve our workforce issues completely, but it's a huge first step. 🌀❄️

Bill

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