

try Education —NOW!



Charlie Cook

An investment in education might be the greatest return on investment we can make

RUNNING LEAN, OFTEN BEHIND, AND usually uphill all the way, every one of us in the construction industry is gasping for air and is not able to take a pause that refreshes, such as the slow, deep breath education can provide. What we already have will have to do, but that can be unfortunate. An investment in education may, in fact, hold more fortune and might be the greatest return on investment we can make.

There is no doubt the most significant variable in our industry is labor, from the CEO to the first-day hire in the field. No doubt there are inevitable and sometimes drastic fluctuations in some materials as worldwide demand creates shortages. Also every “Constructionexpo” sales pitch will try to convince us all that some new piece of equipment or technology breakthrough will amazingly increase profits, and to some extent they will. Still, the fundamental variable for good (or not so good) remains the people of our industry. It is a challenge for all of us to see that the ultimate result is for the good.

To view the glass half empty, we must recognize that we do not have a glamorous industry. Even “Bob the Builder” popularity among children has not caused construction to rise on children’s lists of “wanna be’s when I grow up.” In fact, one college survey put construction near the

very bottom of everyone’s list, just above shrimp boat crew.

On the other hand, viewing the glass as half full, we have an industry in which the best rise to the challenge, and the creative spirit of human ingenuity is given opportunity on a daily basis to flourish.

Of course, if we look at both the challenges and the opportunities together, we recognize that education is the solution. This is particularly true for the Generation Y workers that are coming into our workforces and will ultimately be the key to our success. With this in mind, there are three major reasons why education is important in moving forward and improving performance.

Promote Personal Improvement

Generation Y workers want and expect more than money as compensation. More employees look to new challenges, advancement, and personal improvement as a necessary part of their work environment. Education is an important element for raising employee capabilities to new levels that improve company performance while providing learning and growth opportunities for interested employees. The General Building Contractors Association (GBCA) and the Associated General Contractors of America (AGC) nationally provide hour-long, half day, full

day, and semester long programs that are complete within themselves and can provide the participant with key knowledge and skills within targeted topics.

In fact, GBCA has offered for several years what is known as “Education on Demand.” A company with one or more employees seeking specific skill improvement or training can contact GBCA and the staff will research appropriate programs for the specific needs. Properly utilized with eager employees, education not only becomes a win to the company’s bottom line, but it can be offered as a perk to employees wishing to better themselves.

Improve Human Potential

Improving human potential through training and education increases productivity through better communication, time management, leadership, planning, scheduling, and other critical areas of execution. The equipment, software systems, and methodology each constructor now uses are available to all contractors. So, expecting to improve merely through inanimate means is not realistic. A com-

pany can no longer buy a bigger and better machine and expect corporate production to improve. Only through improving the output of people do results actually reach the bottom line.

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Utilize New Technologies

Recent estimates state human knowledge doubles every four years. Here, however, is the bad news for those unwilling to harvest the new sciences. The methods used today will be improved and revitalized

within a decade. Lean Construction, Green Construction, Integrated Practices, and Building Information Modeling are no longer buzzwords for the future. They are what is happening now, and companies cannot afford to ignore what clients will be expecting.

New methods, technologies, and processes will replace tried and true methods at alarming rates. No one now knows how to use a slide rule and for estimators, digitizers have replaced simple take-off tapes. These are just minor examples compared to the new methods being developed for design and execution of construction. It is possible some Owners may not be able to manipulate the newest technologies or processes themselves, but through contracts they will be expecting, even requiring, constructors to deliver the greatest in the latest manner possible.

A global village that doubles knowledge every four years will not be kind to any industry that does not keep up. H. G. Wells commented that civilization is on a collision course between education and catastrophe. In the extraordinarily challenging construction industry where survival is seldom certain, ignoring the positive bottom line impact of education may be catastrophically shortsighted.

Finally, it has been observed that all wealth is created by the mind. Unless one hits the lottery, that is undoubtedly true. One can rely on either working harder or working smarter. Stress and toil may get us what we have gotten in the past. Only improved skills and knowledge will get us more than what we already have. No one should expect the industry or the competition to fail to improve. A little education now and then (mostly now) will save many companies from extinction.

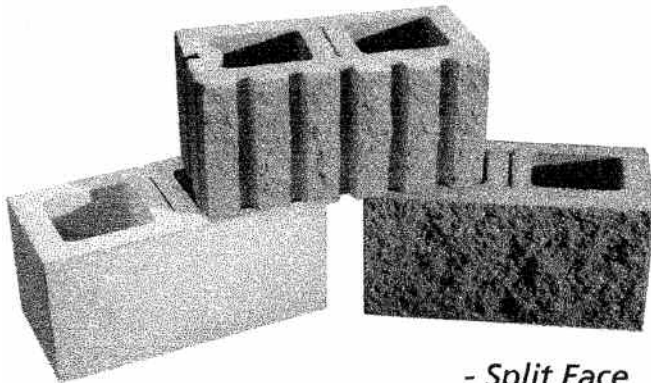
Fortunately, at the General Building Contractors Association the glass is full. Through the foresight of those pre-generation Xers—way back then they were called “sir”—the Industry Advancement Program was developed to help our members improve knowledge and skills through a wide choice of programs and courses.

Please contact Michael Magee, GBCA at (215) 568-7015 for more details or to suggest specific education needs you would like addressed.■

Charles Cook is the Chairman of the GBCA Education Committee.

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