



National Mentoring Month

by Kevin W. Kuntz

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It's no secret that Workforce Development is one of the construction industry's greatest challenges. So, it's fitting that January is National Mentoring Month, because it's my personal mission as President of AGC Georgia to highlight the importance of mentoring in order to develop a stronger future workforce in the construction industry. By providing leadership to the incoming generation, we are able to help them grow professional and personally.



AGC Georgia's Young Leadership Program and the Executive Alliance collaborated on the development of a mentoring session about "Attracting, Retaining and Developing Talent through Mentoring." Helping guide the session was McCarthy Construction's National Trainer Courtney Tucker, who provided vital insights on how to be successful. She understands those best practices all too well, succeeding as a female in an industry that is heavily dominated by males.

McCarthy has recently put an emphasis on recruiting both females and minorities to the industry. And, this is a mindset change, since most people join the construction industry through family members who are already involved. For instance, my father began as a carpenter and introduced me to the trades at a very young age.

If someone doesn't take that first step to introduce the opportunity, that generational engagement won't emerge. AGC Georgia wants to take advantage of this notion by being heavily involved in grade and trade schools, because of the incredible opportunities that are available. By equipping students with the necessary skills needed, they can get started in the industry without that family history.

As electronic communications have improved, it has allowed the industry to draw more awareness to our mentoring presence. We are now able to provide mentoring on a more personal level to more young talent.

When I began in the business, I was being mentored and discovered that my best mentors were those who took interest in my family and me. My professional life was grounded by my personal life, and you could see that they cared. In return, this created a bond not only with my mentor but with my company and industry as well.

It's also important to understand that there are more opportunities available besides college. The focus needs to encompass all training that is available, rather than what is considered the norm. When I recently addressed a group of students, I told them that I went to college and paid for it swinging a hammer. I started working on a construction site when I was 15 as a tradesman which led to me earning construction management degree. Even without a background in construction, you need to seek out what best fits you as an individual. A trade helps you not only personally, but professionally as well. Carpenters without an engineering degree can still go on to become a superintendent, project manager and make fabulous money, drive a company vehicle and have great company benefits. Point being, that even without a college degree, these individuals can still go on to make a great living in a great industry.

Our challenge today is to get young people who are already in school systems to look at all of their available opportunities. So, we need to educate counselors as much as we do the parents and the students. We recently had more than 80 school counselors evaluate an electrical training program, so they could better understand what the field has to offer. After graduating from high school, their students could avoid college debt and enjoy a wealth of benefits in the industry. The counselors were amazed at the level of income these students could earn if they continued to pursue these careers.

During this session, an instructor with more than 30 years on the job, asked the counselors, "Do you realize how electronics are changing today? The need for people with smaller hands and fingers is needed more than ever. Who did I just describe? A woman is correct. Women with their hands and ability to follow detail are really an ideal fit for the electrical industry."

For those in the construction industry, it starts with us. It's important to share the opportunities of the construction industry in order to gain exposure from the incoming workforce. Take students to a construction site and help provide that level of hands-on interaction that will have their interest peaked at a young age.

It starts when they're 10-12 years old. Ultimately allowing them to make a more informed decision when it comes to advancing their education, whether that is in academics or a specific trade of their choice. The opportunities are endless. So, join me in becoming a mentor to help guide the younger generations to achieve their full potential.