



Construction Employer Roundtable Notes

Workforce Snohomish, in collaboration with Snohomish County and Economic Alliance Snohomish County, has been convening monthly industry-focused employer roundtables to gauge and assess our region's workforce challenges. These roundtable events have identified issues that are industry-specific, as well as those seen across all types and sizes of employers. Each quarter, Workforce Snohomish shares the results with all interested community partners to help align and focus community resources.

Construction Employers met on 2/22/17 and identified multiple issues that they are facing within their workforce. The workforce community partners will continue to realign the community resources to address the deeper and more systemic issues facing the pipeline, retention, and development of the retail workforce. While solutions are being developed and implemented, the community of partners would like to make sure that current solutions for many of the issues raised currently exist and can help the engaged businesses.

The Following are the takeaways from the Construction Employer Roundtable Meeting on 2/22/17.

How to Read: underlined are the Different Sections, the red text are the **Gaps / Needs Improvements**, the green text are the **Possible Solutions / Recommendations**, and the black text are the general comments that apply to the section.

1. Pipeline Issues:

A. Difficult positions to fill:

- Laborers
- Truck drivers
 - Employers find themselves having to re-evaluate disciplinary policies because drivers can get another job the next day.
- Employers needing painters.
 - Partnered with a community college's auto collision program to expand into construction painting and coatings.

B. Not enough young people are coming into the trades.

- The younger generation does not view construction as a worthy career and it is beneath them.



1. There is a need to put the “gleam” in young people’s eyes about construction.
 - When recruiting on college campuses, “Curiosity is a great indicator” to business if their message is tailored for the audience.
 - Younger people have a sense of entitlement.
 1. Expect higher than starting wage with no experience.
- C. Trying to figure out “what makes millennials tick?” An example research study showed that they don’t want formal reviews. They’d rather, instead, just have supervisors talk to them along the way.
 - Find out what employees want from the employer.
 1. Microsoft offered a workshop on how to talk to Millennials.
 - Millennials appreciate authenticity, to be straight with them, and express clear expectations.
- D. There are 20-30 year olds graduating with construction management degrees.
 - But they lack construction experience.
 1. They also expect to start at the top.
 - Anticipate higher wages to start.
 1. They do not understand wage progression.
 - a. Average occupation wage is not a starting wage.
- E. Bigger differential between supervisors and laborers.
 - It is more difficult to find people who want to get their hands dirty.
- F. Middle and High Schools don’t have shop classes anymore.
 - How do students get exposure to the trades these days?
 - Need to start in elementary school with building blocks and advance to geometry, etc.
 - Something needs to be done to get students more interested in the trades or at least an exposure to the opportunities, e.g. career fairs, TradeUP.
- G. Potential hires cannot pass drug test.
 - Marijuana may be legal, but they still cannot have it on the jobsites.
- H. Workers are looking for dependable companies.
 - They want to keep busy throughout the year
 1. A lot of Construction is seasonal.
- I. There are long wait lists for apprenticeship opportunities (CITC)
<http://www.citcwa.com/> specifically mentioned carpentry and HVAC. It can be up to a year to get on wait list.



- J. State does not have electrician reciprocal certifications so workers from other areas only are permitted up to 90 days.
- K. Private and public sides of this sectors experiencing similar workforce challenges.
- L. One employer uses temp hiring because they cannot find full time employees.

2. Retention issues:

- A. Worker's lack soft skills.
 - They are not showing up on time or at all.
 - Punctuality.
 - One thing they have found that has helped with tardiness, etc. is to explain how it impacts the whole crew/team. Some people respond to that.
 - Politeness.
 - Human interaction, e.g., trouble reading people.
 - Customer service.
 - Lack of dependability.
- B. Younger people have a sense of entitlement.
 - They do not take instruction well.
- C. Aging workforce.
 - Older workers can't continue the physical demands of the job and the knowledge base will leave with retirement.
- M. Need an "old-fashioned work ethic." It still takes hard work to get ahead.
- N. Lack of trained workforce bumps the schedule, slows down productivity, and affects the bottom line of the construction businesses. Their customers are relying on the construction to be on time.
- O. Construction is "old school" and change is slow.
 - It's hard to change an older workers' mindset.
- P. Safety First.
 - Some workers don't understand why they must turn off phones and headphones.
 - Need to build-in safety issues in training so the workers can easily identify them.
 - Need increase training standards.
- Q. In exit interviews, some workers state that the reason they are leaving is because:
 - The health insurance premiums are high.



- They aren't busy enough.
- R. Job hopping is a chronic issue in the field.
 - When workers see that their project is ending, they will jump to another employer to make sure they have secure employment.
- D. Hire veterans and sprinkle them through workforce because their good habits sometimes rub off (dependable, punctual, etc.)
- E. Pair older workers with younger workers to form mentorships.
 - Do a mind meld with best workers to gain their knowledge.
 - Encourage supervisors to see their roles as mentors.
- F. Employers are having to change with the times.
 - The culture needs to change, e.g. yelling at employees is no longer okay.
- G. One company has tuition reimbursement program.
 - But they are so busy, workers don't have the time to go to school.
- H. Government contracts have specific workforce diversity targets.
 - But there are still too few of women and minorities in the trades. There is a need to reflect the general population.
 - There is still an "old boy's network" that some find distasteful.
- I. Huge need for high schools to help identify opportunities for students, e.g., Career Days, Touch-a-Truck, and TradeUP.
- J. Project Labor Agreement (PLA) has phenomenal training programs.
<http://www.soundtransit.org/About-Sound-Transit/Doing-business-with-us/Project-Labor-Agreement>.

3. How do you identify people to upskill into upper jobs?

- A. Reliability.
- B. Takes initiative.
- C. Eager to learn, and open to learning.
- D. Willing to learn from their mistakes.

4. Why do you do this work?

- A. Immense respect for the hard workers. Their contribution is undersold.
- B. Grew up in the business.
- C. Take pride in building things and seeing the project to completion.
- D. Enjoys taking a vision and making it a reality.
- E. Wants to see something built from the ground up.



- F. Likes the company where they are employed.
- G. Enjoys the diversity of projects and opportunity to collaborate.
- H. Wants to help people get good jobs (S3 – women, people of color).
- I. Use of hands to make the vision real.
- J. Work as a team to finish a project.
- K. A former middle school math/science teacher sees the need for hands-on work for students who may not be college material.
- L. Job always changes, lots of diversity in the work.
- M. Pride in building something from nothing (and with no safety issues).