

Labor/Management Viewpoints: Not all training programs are equal

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There have been a number of articles written about apprenticeship training and the comparison of the Joint Apprenticeship Training Committee programs and those of the nonrepresented, or Associated Builders and Contractors, programs. These articles led the reader to believe that training is training and the net result of the final product is equal. Although the state of Wisconsin Bureau of Apprenticeship Standards monitors them both, let us not forget those standards are minimums.

Simply stated, with JATC programs, representatives of a labor organization and representatives of contractors' associations signatory to a collective-bargaining agreement work together with equal representation to advise the direction and implementation of training.

Signatory contractors also contribute funding as a wage diversion of the total wage and benefit package under the collective-bargaining agreement. That contribution covers the costs of training for the apprentice so the apprentice has no out-of-pocket expense for his or her schooling.

For the carpenters in Milwaukee, the Southeast Wisconsin Carpentry JATC has two stand-alone training facilities that provide the training. This investment provides training that cannot be matched elsewhere. The cognitive skills are taught in a classroom environment. Textbooks, codes and industry standards are used to reinforce the methods of construction. After basic principals are taught, students are taken into a closely monitored shop environment where they are required to demonstrate the skill as taught in class by a seasoned journeyman instructor who was trained and skilled in those tasks. This unique arrangement clearly demonstrates the philosophy of the industry educating itself and preparing for the future.

Only the beginning

All of that effort produces a graduate after four years who is capable of being called journeyman. But that is only the beginning. The other function of the JATC is to provide additional training opportunities to those who have achieved journey level status. Unlike its competition, JATC offers a concentrated effort to encourage union members to take skill-advancement training. This training will develop new skills and reinforce previously learned skills as well as help with industry advancements and teach new safety requirements. All of this training is offered under the philosophy that a better-educated workforce is a more efficient, safer, more productive workforce and, let's not forget, at no out-of-pocket expense to the eligible student.

When all is said and done, isn't it better to buy value over cost? Quality over price? Safety over cheap? The JATC function is pure and simple. Training is important for one to learn the basics of a craft and equally as important to provide lifelong learning. That said, keep in mind that the overwhelming majority of construction projects are done through the competitive bid process. That in itself is proof that cost per hour does not necessarily reflect the total price of the job.

And, consider these results:

- The Southeast Wisconsin Carpentry JATC graduated more than 545 apprentices to journeymen since 1992.
- More than 1,000 journeymen trades workers have taken upgrade training at the Southeast Wisconsin Carpentry Training Centers in the last two years.
- 87 percent of apprentice graduates are still active in the trades since 1999.

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