

Union construction can't become complacent

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After decades as the world's only economic superpower, America is so dominant in the global marketplace that it's easy to believe that we're just competing against ourselves. In recent years, though, the playing field has leveled and countries like China, India and Russia are making it clear that our biggest opponent is not ourselves.

The same thing has been happening in the construction industry. For many years, the trades have been so strong that we began to think we were just competing against ourselves. Many new homes are built by our employees. Many of the commercial buildings are the result of our quality work. Our remodeling experts handle thousands of jobs every year.

But we can't fall into a false sense of security. In reality, we compete with hundreds of commercial and residential builders every day to win projects throughout southeastern Wisconsin. Without a focused and motivated work force, we won't be able to maintain our dominance and continue our commitment to innovation within the industry.

That's why it's imperative for management and labor to work together as a team, and why we're developing programs to unite us in this mission. Together, we are fighting the complacency that threatens to weaken our industry.

We also must continue to invest heavily in training programs for our employees to enhance our current trades people's skills and attract future workers. More than 50 percent of our current craft workers will retire in the next 15 years, underscoring the need for a fresh work force. Our industry apprenticeship program addresses this issue to keep us strong.

Ongoing training

Plus, we provide, encourage and mandate ongoing training to keep our craftsmen on the cutting edge of technology and safety. This allows us to maintain a highly skilled work force, building skills from within our ranks. As we invest in our current work force, we provide ourselves a strong foundation on which to build our future employee base.

Recent developments in the industry have allowed less skilled workers into the labor force, undercutting our employees' ability to compete on price alone. This influx of cheap labor may seem beneficial in the short term, but it poses long-term safety and quality issues for our entire community. In facing these troubles, we need to work even harder to educate consumers about the advantages of hiring our contractors and employees.

For example, we pay our employees fair wages with excellent benefits to keep our work force – and the surrounding community – vibrant. With this dedication to our employees and the communities they live in, we are keeping our industry strong.

The construction industry is growing quickly, constantly presenting new opportunities for excellence. By investing in our work force and educating the community about the benefits of our contractors and trades people, we will continue to avoid complacency and promote excellence in our industry.

Like our great country, we need to keep our eye on the competition, while constantly enhancing ourselves to maintain our dominance in the marketplace.

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