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## Some advice for the future

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Six years ago, I was involved in the first meeting to strengthen the relationship between labor and management. After nearly three decades in the trades, I was excited to be a part of what I considered – and still consider – the most important component of a healthy work force: a strong sense of understanding between labor and management. As I retire from the industry this month, I consider this achievement one of the industry's greatest in my tenure here, and I hope this can continue for many years after I've left the organization.

As I see it, labor and management need to do three things: continue working together to understand each other, promote a positive image of the industry and reinforce the apprenticeship programs. With these things, we will continue to grow strong in southeastern Wisconsin.

A decade ago, labor and management were butting heads at the bargaining table. We didn't understand each other, and it hurt our ability to function as a strong work force. Now that we have a better understanding of each other, we can move forward, and we are better able to compete with nonunion workers and other union groups.

As a labor leader, I learned much from the contractors, associations and laborers who I worked with. In order to do what's best for my members, I had to do what was best for the industry – and that meant understanding all sides of the issues and keeping the lines of communication open with all parties.

## Common ground

In today's market, labor and management leaders need to understand each other and get to know each other away from the negotiating table. This gives all of us a better perspective on the industry – from the construction market and our competitiveness in that market to productivity and professionalism.

We also need to actively recruit new workers and convince contractors to hire them, while providing excellent continuing education to keep the work force strong. This is the only way to provide quality carpenters for the future to ensure the long-term health of the industry.

Like several other leaders, I see the merging of building trades unions as inevitable in the future. The trades can either work together to make these mergers beneficial for all of our members, or they can refuse to work toward a peaceful consolidation – losing contractors, market share and ultimately our members. It will certainly be difficult, but I believe it must happen.

Until then, we need to continue to work hard every day to get the job done right and well. We need to forget job divisions to move faster, get the job done quicker and further promote the benefits of our industry.

I enjoyed this job – it's the best job I've ever had, and I can't imagine having another one as fulfilling as this has been. I will miss the industry. Thank you.

*Jeff Dziedzic is the regional director of the Chicago Regional Council of Carpenters. After 33 years in the construction industry and 29 years in the trades, he is retiring on June 30.*