

Training and dedication are keys to success

John Topp

August 25, 2005

When a service professional is hired, be it an attorney, landscaper or architect for example, it is assumed this person is skilled and able to provide the best service possible; years of training and education have gone into making this person a skilled professional. Hiring construction contractors is no different; these professionals are just as accomplished and knowledgeable in their trade.

Initially, three to five years of on-the-job training teach the construction workers' chosen craft. Additionally, these people continue to work side by side master craftsman to hone their skills. Classroom learning of safety regulations and the latest technology complements this practical education.

As with any career, there sometimes comes a desire to strike out on one's own, to test one's entrepreneurial spirit. This requires additional skills and commitments such as an understanding of the risks and a willingness and ability to make significant personal investments. A business owner quickly realizes that reputation and quality of work is a big asset and a tremendous marketing tool.

Another strategic tool is to join a trade association. These groups help with networking, referral service, project efficiency and on-the-job training. The association can also provide business skills such as project and time management, teaching techniques for estimating/bidding on jobs, basic engineering knowledge, developing a payroll and setting up accounts payable and purchasing systems. In addition, it is important to be aware of the other trades work being done on job sites; this coordination is key to being efficient and profitable.

Something every business owner learns is to always hire skilled employees, ensuring a job done well. Another important business lesson is to treat both employees and customers fairly and with respect -- traits that will lead to a successful service business.

But one key to both being a skilled craftsman and having a successful business is the dedication and perseverance to truly learn the trade -- working as an apprentice, becoming a journeyman and honing skills by working with a master craftsman. Achieving the status of a construction contractor, like anything else done right, takes training and hard work.

John Topp is the executive director of Building Advantage and the Construction Labor Management Council of Southeast Wisconsin Inc.