

Present and future workforce: recruitment and succession

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Current workforce trends cannot be ignored. Workforce trends now include a decreasing labor force, a more diversified workforce, and an aging population. Over the next decade (2015-2025) the labor force “growth” is projected to be just .2%. Our current generations of workers (the Gen-Xers and Millennials) are more racially and ethnically diverse than any other generation before. By 2020, almost 20% of the U.S. population will be 65 years old or older. Succession planning cannot be left on the back burner.

So, bring on the Young Professionals (YPs). The average age for entry level into public works is 40 years old, and 50% of our public works professionals are 46-50 years old. The importance of partnerships with our

high schools, community colleges, pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship programs is crucial. We need to take advantage of the opportunities for hiring when presented, but this will not happen on its own. Agencies must be proactive in recruitment practices. Fill that pipeline constantly. It's never too early to get people **curious and excited** about our industry.

How? Where? Who? Here are some examples...

Trade and equipment shows are not just about sales any longer. Many of the events are now tying in an “educational” component for the attendees. The organizers are also extending the invitations beyond those who are currently working in public works. The local high schools,



NH Governor Maggie Hassan at the NH DOT Storm Water demonstration, NH Construction Career Days

Career Technical Education (CTE) centers and other post-high school programs are being asked to attend as well. This is a sure-fire way to expose a new generation to public works and all that it encompasses.

Internships allow for the “hands-on” which is the best way to learn and to gain experience. Other programs such as **Construction Career Days****, **AASHTO TRAC**, **Project Lead the Way**, **STEM** and **NCCER** curriculums are also great venues and resources for recruiting and retaining a new crop of workers.

In September, ****New Hampshire Construction Career Days (CCD)** (www.nhccd.weebly.com) hosted nearly 1,000 high school students from across the granite state. The 70 exhibits included everything from excavator and grader operations, to bridge building and robotic technology. CCDs across the country introduce students to professions they may never have considered, simply because they were never exposed to them.



Grader instruction at NH Construction Career Days

The deemed “non-traditional” professions for the female students (13% in attendance for 2014), for instance, have had the greatest impact. The girls are able to see themselves as bridge builders, as operators, as welders or carpenters. Why? Because they were able actually do the **jobs** at the hands-on exhibits. The students are also able to speak with secondary educational institutions and alternative post-high school educational programs (apprenticeships, internships).

Did it get them excited? Start a conversation? Absolutely! Now we must keep the conversation going.


These events also serve as a morale boost to those already in the profession. Workshops and “shop talk” outside of their workplace highlights the importance and far-reaching effects of **their** work. Aside from just recruiting, now it’s a matter of *retention*, too! If your workers are involved in events that allow for them to transfer their professional knowledge/expertise to someone

else, this is truly a win-win situation. They are staying engaged by engaging others. There’s a value-added component here which is exactly “priceless.”

Recruiting a diverse workforce on its surface may seem like a daunting task, but if you look at who is on your payroll now, you’ll recognize all the diversity that lies within. Keep in mind that the demographics of your workforce should also reflect your service area. As witnessed with current events, if an agency is not demographically reflective of the community it serves, it can erupt into a serious and dangerous situation. Is your community racially, ethnically, religiously diverse? If so, then so should your employment roster. Appreciate that reflection.

Diversity is not a compromise. It is a step forward. It welcomes everyone to the workplace and commits to a level playing field—a field where talents are recognized, opportunities are available and promotions depend on performance. Diversity allows for inclusiveness and, yes, better business practices. As Mark Riley (Supervisor, City of Dublin, Ohio) wrote in the September issue of the *APWA Reporter*, “Employers should be mindful... that diversity can strengthen an organization as a whole.”

For more information about Construction Career Days or resources for this article, please contact: Catherine Schoenenberger, (978) 692-2114 or staysafetraffic@aol.com.

Special Reminder: Please make sure you update your personal membership profile, including answering the optional questions 13-16 (see page 10, November 2013 *Reporter*). Please refer to APWA’s 2013 *Diversity Resource Guide 2nd Edition* and the Diversity Toolbox for more ideas in celebrating the diversity in your chapter. 



A student engaged in the welding station at NH Construction Career Days