

DEPARTMENTAL NEWS

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Marketing Issues

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RECRUITING AND RETAINING: A KEY TO MARKET GROWTH

In past issues of the Journeymen Magazine I have discussed the importance of increasing the Union sector market share. Growth can be accomplished by increasing the signatory base of contractors or by increasing the available labor pool, both skilled and unskilled, for our signatory contractors giving them the opportunity to expand their share of the industry. Along that line, some of the signatory contractors that I have discussed industry issues with have indicated that they can expand the annual amount of work performed if they feel confident that there is an available workforce.

I know from experience how difficult it can be for our Locals to recruit roofers when requested by our contractors. The practice of “stripping” to fill contractors’ requests has been very successful in most parts of the country. In addition many of our Locals and their J.A.T.C.’s actively engage in Job Fairs to recruit new Apprentices. However it is apparently not the entire solution to the biggest problem we are facing in our industry today and that is the availability of a skilled labor force to meet our current and future needs. Attracting young men and women into this industry who can provide thirty to thirty-five years of service is the issue we must address.

Considering the average attained age of a roofer in the industry is nearly forty years of age, we will be losing to retirement a significant amount of our workforce over the next ten to fifteen years. In addition the average entry age is nearly thirty years of age. Therefore the issue of recruitment becomes even more critical in the very near future. Furthermore an aging workforce puts a significant strain on our Health and Welfare and Pension plans which is another subject matter entirely.

However, we all know from experience that the solution to the problem is not that easy. As stated earlier, we all know how difficult it is to bring young men and women into this industry. Even when we are successful, the overall retention rate is dismal to say the least; this in spite of the good wages and benefits that our Collective Bargaining Agreements have to offer.

I have heard from many of our Local Unions on this issue and the most common response is that the “young people” in general either do not find the construction industry appealing (much less roofing) or that the starting wages and the lack of significant yearly hours are a detriment to retaining new roofers. Whatever the case may be, this issue must be addressed immediately. In order for the Union sector of the industry to gain market share, we must find a solution to this problem of recruitment and retention.

The solution is not just the responsibility of the International or Local Unions. There must be Labor/Management cooperation on a local and national level in developing a plan to recruit, train and retain new roofers. New ideas need to be developed that make this industry appealing and lucrative to potential candidates. Discussions need to be held between all parties concerning techniques that work and those that fail. Simply trying to sell our good wages and benefits apparently is not the sole answer to the problem. We need to identify why potentially good roofers walk away from their employer after one day, week or month on the job! What makes younger workers attracted or drawn to the roofing industry today may not be the same reason you or I were attracted to the industry ten, twenty or thirty years ago.

Finally, if you as a working member are asking yourself why I should be concerned about this issue, keep in mind the future of your Local Union and the benefits it provides are dependent on continued membership growth and retention! ■

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