4 TIPS FOR OVERCOMING THE LABOR SHORTAGE
The construction industry is booming. Since the bottom fell out of the real estate market in 2009, there has been a steady increase in activity resulting in thousands of available construction jobs being added each year. So much so, companies are struggling to find qualified workers on a consistent basis.

In many cases, under-qualified labor is hired, the workers aren't up to the task, and the schedule and budget take further hits just to remedy the mistakes made. It's no one's fault—it's simply the result of not having enough properly trained individuals.

Advances in building materials and installation techniques have changed the conventional construction industry. In order to be efficient, new workers must understand how and why building products are installed a certain way.

For companies and professionals suffering from the industry's labor shortage, these four tips can help overcome some of those obstacles and keep projects on schedule and on budget.

1. Improve Training Opportunities

The ability for your workforce to move vertically will attract employees looking for something more than just swinging a hammer. The sad truth is there are a lot of companies that have no interest in providing continuing education for their workers. In economic times like these, that sort of reputation will have skilled laborers looking elsewhere.
In a competitive market, a company’s skill set and versatility are assets to winning projects. Training your workforce builds pride, and that pride will be reflected in success. Expanding the scope of what your business can do, such as masons or carpenters learning to use ICFs, increases your business’s market potential.

It starts by having the people in charge show an interest in teaching their workforce how to do their jobs better. This also includes preparing them for more responsibility and better wages. There doesn’t have to be a complete overhaul in how business is done, but enough to show potential labor you are willing to invest in their continued well-being.

Taking it further, construction companies can set up more formal training programs or provide funding for workers to take classes to expand their skillset and stay relevant in the industry. If your company can build a reputation as one that adds value beyond the paycheck, you’re much less likely to suffer from workers turning their back on you.

2. A Renewed Focus on Safety

No one wants to end up in the hospital with a two-foot rebar sticking out of their leg. If you can show workers your company puts an emphasis on jobsite safety, the open positions will start to look more attractive. OSHA makes sure that certain safety standards are enforced, but even more can be done to keep the hospital beds free of scaffolding fall victims.

Give mandatory courses to any new employees to make sure they know all the best safety practices they should be following. Take things beyond the hardhat and the yellow vest—make sure that initial training is directly pertinent to the type of work they will be doing. Again, it’s all about reputation, and being known as the company that takes care of their crew.
3. Work With Manufacturers

Developing close relationships with manufacturers and material suppliers is a no-brainer for any successful construction or design company. In addition to supporting good business sense, those relationships can help fill the labor gaps in your project’s schedule.

Many building product manufacturers conduct product-specific training; either classroom, webinars, or on site. Understanding the materials and techniques for installation is advantageous for the whole crew. Manufacturers want their products to be installed and function as per their specifications—they are eager to spend hours ensuring every installation is per spec.

When procuring bids and estimates from suppliers, be sure to understand how to accurately estimate materials and man hour rates. Work with the manufacturer’s estimating tools and recommendations to develop an accurate bid and construction schedule.

Working with manufacturers allows your business to be more versatile and, along with training, makes your crew more efficient. The smaller crew of permanent, trained laborers can easily manage and train new laborers.
4. Hire Veterans

In 2015, with the help of an initiative put in place by the US Government, 100 construction companies agreed to hire over 100,000 veterans over the following 5 years. As of now, the program has been an astounding success, as veterans often already have the skills and work ethic necessary to thrive on a construction site. You might even be able to receive federal funding to help these veterans break in their steel-toed boots via the Helmets to Hardhats program.

There might need a bit of up front training involved in hiring vets, but it will pay off in the long run with a hard working labor force and a reputation for reaching out to the service men and women protecting this country. It’s a good look no matter how you shake it out.