

Trades shortage approaching dangerous levels

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First, the good news. Canada's construction industry has rebounded and is expected to rise through the coming decade.

Now, the bad news. By the end of the decade, the industry will have to replace nearly 259,100 workers due to retirement – or about 22 per cent of the current labour force.

Those are some very big numbers. The question is: How will we do it? The answer? We need a very cohesive, co-ordinated, well-thought-out plan to get more people into the construction industry.

Multi-pronged approach

RESCON is suggesting a multi-pronged approach that focuses on exposing youth to the trades, allowing more mobility, changing immigration rules so that employers have more flexibility to recruit for specific trades, and attracting more women to the industry.

To get more youth into the trades, we must tweak the education system. Shop classes have been discontinued at many schools, so youth don't get a chance to see if a skilled trade is a good fit for them.

We must break the stigma that is attached to the trades. Thankfully, the Ontario government has stepped up and is investing in apprenticeship programs and making it easier for trainees to navigate the system.

Expanding programs

To allow for more mobility of the trades, the Red Seal program must be expanded. That will allow qualified trades to fill jobs in provinces that need them. Tower crane operators, elevator installers and mechanics are notably missing from the Red Seal program. They must be brought under the umbrella.

Immigration rules must also be revamped so it is easier for skilled trades to enter and work in Canada. We have asked the federal government to increase the allocation number for Ontario's Immigration Nominee Program (OINP), to give employers flexibility to recruit for specific skilled trades. Applicants also should not be tied to a single employer as trades have to move around for work.

RESCON would like to see a trusted employer program established within the Temporary Foreign Workers Program. This would reward compliant businesses with a more streamlined process to hire workers.

Women in trades

Getting more women into the industry is also key to solving the shortage. More women are taking up trades, but latest figures show they still make up only seven per cent of the trades in Ontario, for example. We must continue to promote the trades as an opportunity for women.

The residential construction sector is presently not keeping pace with demand for housing. The situation will only get worse if we can't recruit enough new workers to fill the shoes of those who are retiring.

A shortage of trades would set our industry back and have disastrous effects on the economy. We must find ways to remedy the situation, and the suggestions RESCON has made are just a start.



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