

Despite the Pandemic Trade Schools Must Persevere Through Virtual Training

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COVID-19 has significantly affected job prospects for youth pondering careers in the hospitality and restaurant industries. However, the construction industry might be able to benefit from that.

Skilled Trades as Opportunity

Richard Lyall, President of the [Residential Construction Council of Ontario](#), and Jon Callegher, Executive Director of [Job Talks](#), a marketing and research agency that promotes the many benefits of careers in the skilled trades, believe the construction industry can provide youth with an attractive alternative.

Construction, deemed an essential service and therefore remained open for business during the pandemic, is well-positioned to pick up the slack from other industries, the two experts believe.

“A lot of people in the hospitality, and especially the food service industry, are used to working with tools,” explained Lyall. “The work is manual, they’re on their feet a lot, and so they have a natural aptitude there. We know the hospitality industry is going to take a hit going forward, so the young people who thought about working in that sector might want to consider switching to the construction trades.

“Just like the old saying goes, ‘Don’t let a good disaster go to waste.’ Well, this is going to be one of those situations.”

Filling the Void

Construction is feeling the pressure as many Baby Boomers still working in the industry are looking at retirement, and the pandemic might force their hand. While the manpower situation will probably remain balanced over the short term, the industry will still need new recruits in future to fill the void.

With the service industries falling on hard times and fewer jobs in the mix, the belief is that contractors can capitalize. However, it still requires a mindset change with teachers, parents and guidance counsellors.

According to Callegher, the romantic idea of young people attending university, graduating four years later and securing a good job is changing.

“It’s not happening, and that has been the case for a very long time. However, that’s the mindset that many parents and many teachers that have university degrees still associate with a good life.”

Benefits of the Trades

Callegher says the construction industry might be able to entice more youth into the fold by promoting the benefits of a career in the building industry, such as job security, a variety of work, and a work-life balance.

“These jobs allow you to be physically active and use your body and brain,” he said. “In this digital age, I can’t think of anything that is more important than to have a career that actually gets you moving.”

Adapting to the New Normal

Because of COVID-19 and the challenges it poses to hands-on training, the industry will have to adapt and find new ways to school recruits. A training school might include more online and virtual training.

Lyall says it might be tough to change longstanding attitudes towards learning and how the trades are taught, but the industry has no choice but to embrace new ways of online and virtual schooling.

The old way of training apprentices by having them work in the field and then go back to school is an antiquated model, and the scopes of practices in some of the trades also need to be revamped, says Lyall.

“We have to realize that it’s likely that in a decade, a number of the top trades in Canada are going to be things we haven’t thought of yet. We’re going to have a lot more automation, we’re going to be using drones, we’re going to have technicians on site to repair equipment.”

Down the road, he said, construction will be more high-tech. It will make use of artificial intelligence, for example, to drive machines that will be used in tunnelling and work involving handling toxic materials.

Disappearing Barriers

Although there have been many barriers in the past, necessity will drive many positive trends like in e-learning, said Lyall. There are some phenomenal systems out there, but educational institutions have not been quick off the mark in adopting them, he noted. “This is now forcing those changes to happen, which is a good thing.”

The two industry stakeholders discussed their thoughts on getting more recruits into the industry in a half-hour podcast, entitled [Talking Trades – How to Attract Young People to Construction](#), released recently by the [Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario](#). It can be found at rccao.com.