



Navigating the Trade Workforce Dilemma: It's Time to Get to Work

Anthony E. Sparkling, Ph.D., LEED AP BD+C
Assistant Professor, Purdue University

Panel Members:

Andy Berg
Executive Director, NECA San Diego Chapter

Christeen Parsons
CEO, Speelman Electric, LLC

Sonja Rheäume
President, Christenson Electric, Inc.

This session is eligible for 1 Continuing Education Hour

For these hours to appear on your certificate, you must:

- Scan your badge at the door
- Attend 90% of the session
- Fill out the online evaluation



What is going on with labor...

- Shortage of skilled labor in the U.S. which started in the 1980s
- Labor availability issues are more pronounced on projects w/tight schedules – **impacts safety, quality, and costs (overreliance of OT)**



Workforce statistics show that...

- Over **165,000** construction job openings (as of Dec-24')
- Job separations (**310,000**) continue to outweigh new hires (**170,000**)
- Btw. 2007-2011 over **2 million workers** were laid off – never returning to the industry
- **1 in 4** construction workers over the **age of 55** (nearing retirement)
- BLS showed **union membership declining** (12.6% in 2021 – **10.3% in 2024**)



What did we do to start addressing this dilemma?



Research Summary



The study responds to the evolving nature of the construction trade workforce.

Study: Involved a nationwide survey of nearly 700 IBEW electricians and 25 interviews w/individuals representing NECA contractors (The Top Performers)

Objective: To provide ECs w/strategies to manage, recruit, and retain trade workers



Industry Perceptions

Workforce Motivation

- ✦ Fringe Benefits
- ✦ Preferred Work Schedule
- ✦ Overtime
- ✦ Commitment

Workforce Recruitment

- ✦ Image Perceptions
- ✦ Promotion for the Trades

Workforce Retention

- ✦ Amount of Supervision
- ✦ Stress Levels
- ✦ Safety Training
- ✦ Productivity and Quality
- ✦ Promotion and Career Growth
- ✦ Work Environment
- ✦ Mentoring

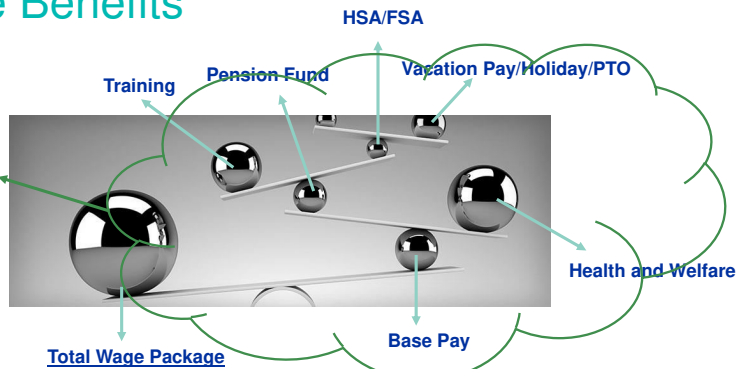


Workforce Motivation



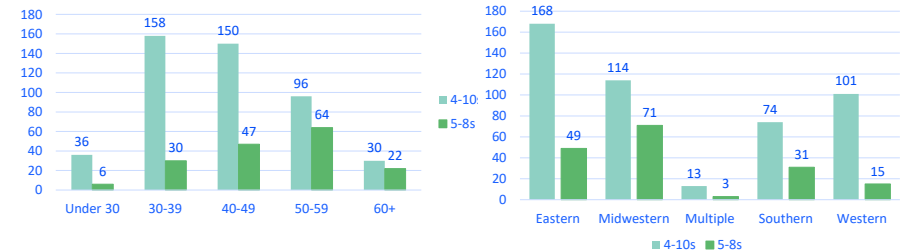
Fringe Benefits

- ❖ Evaluate changes holistically
- ❖ Bring awareness to existing benefits (e.g., mental health support)
- ❖ Consider offering additional programs (e.g., mentoring, financial literacy, etc.)



NECA NOW
2025

Work Schedule Preferences



- ✓ Increased flexibility for family commitments/personal appointments
- ✓ Reduces # of daily commutes
- ✓ Can help prioritize work-life balance

NECA NOW
2025

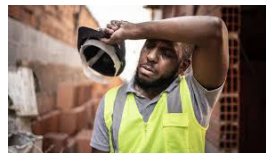
Working Overtime



- 77% of study participants (Top Performers) report that they are willing to work OT when asked noting it's:

"because they are here to help, are a team player, for emergency calls, when the customer needs it, when dealing with power shutdowns and changeovers, as the job demands, to meet deadlines, extra pay and financial advantages."

But, how do we avoid this?

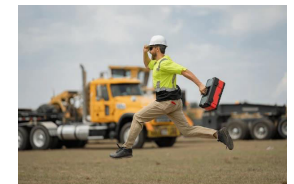


NECA NOW
2025

Employee Commitment

How do you keep employees satisfied and content in the age of increased mobility?

- ✚ Prioritize individuals' commitment to seeing projects through to completion – creates a sense of ownership
- ✚ Engagement/recognition of worker involvement in decision-making and overall impact on project success
- ✚ Balance incremental costs related to tools, equipment, increased safety training/awareness
- ✚ Create positive work environments



NECA NOW
2025

Workforce Recruitment



Construction Industry Image

OLD

- Construction worker
- Dirty and challenging
- Blue-collar work
- Male-dominated
- Heavy equipment and machinery
- Uneducated

NEW

- Craftsperson/skilled trade professionals
- Rewarding and fulfilling
- Hands-on careers
- Diverse workforce
- Advanced technologies and tools
- Debt-free education



Promoting the Construction Trades



- Financial benefits / good quality jobs
- Professional and personal rewards
- Career growth opportunities
- Gratification from work and mentoring younger trade professionals
- Dynamic work environments and challenges
- Client / customer satisfaction



Workforce Retention



Workforce Retention

• Job Satisfaction

- With their supervision: 670 respondents => **4.19 rating**
- With amount of stress: 661 respondents => **3.42 rating**
- Very little regional variations

Region	Please rate how satisfied you are with the amount of supervision you receive from your company. (1 being not satisfied, 5 being extremely satisfied)					Mean	Total
	1	2	3	4	5		
Eastern	3	7	48	91	78	4.03	227
Midwestern	1	0	30	84	80	4.24	195
Multiple	0	0	0	9	9	4.50	18
Southern	0	0	8	40	64	4.50	112
Western	1	3	22	49	42	4.09	117
Not Reported	0	0	0	1	0	4.00	1
Total	5	10	108	274	273	4.19	670

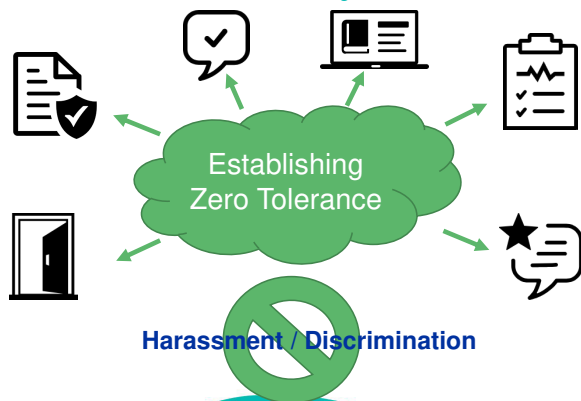
Region	Please rate how stressful your job is. (1 being not stressful, 5 being extremely stressful)					Mean	Total
	1	2	3	4	5		
Eastern	7	26	86	70	34	3.44	223
Midwestern	7	13	84	76	9	3.35	189
Multiple	1	1	3	9	1	3.53	15
Southern	7	12	37	42	14	3.39	112
Western	5	13	36	53	14	3.48	121
Not Reported	0	0	0	1	0	4.00	1
Total	27	65	246	251	72	3.42	661

Mentoring Keys to Success

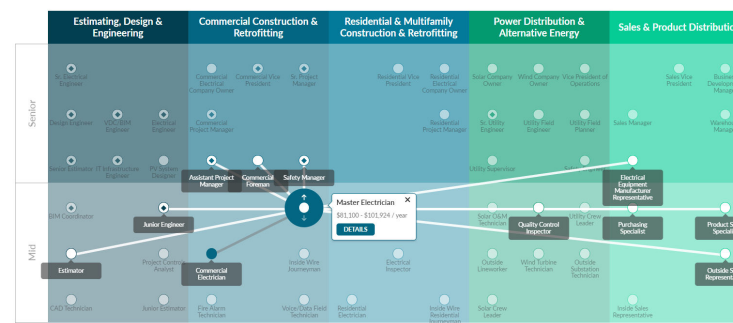


- Commit to talent development
- Create formal mentoring programs
- Support/encourage informal mentoring across levels
- Recognize the interaction btw. mentoring and retention

Work Climate Takeaways



Promotion and Career Growth Example



<https://electricalconstruction.careerpathplatform.com/map/>

How Do You Address the Workforce Shortage?

There's no one-size-fits-all solution



What are other's doing?



UA Local 290
College of Mechanical Systems & Technology



Ideas to build on...

- Develop industry-academic partners
- Improve micro-training opportunities & credentials
- Promote trades & site management/supervision careers
- Embracing New Apprenticeship Programs
- Apprenticeships recognized as being on same level as a college education
- Highlight advanced technology use in construction
- Improve recruitment & retention strategies for URGs incl. veterans
- Support Career & Technical Education programs



It time to get to work...

- ✓ Attracting a new generation of workers
- ✓ Advancing recruitment and retention strategies to outpace other contiguous industries
- ✓ Promoting wages and benefits while balancing flexibility in benefit options



What are you doing in your regions?

Recruitment & Retention

Motivation



Please Complete the Online Evaluation

