

Member Communication Experience

Project Management Amidst the Continuing Construction Labor Shortage

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Being a construction project manager today is a roller coaster, especially if your company is suffering from the labor shortage affecting the nation. It can be disheartening because construction work is always needed, and there is something for everyone.

Since you can't force people to enter a vital and rewarding industry, it's essential to focus on what you can control. Here's what to know about the labor shortage, managing projects with fewer workers, and how to attract new ones.

A World Without Enough Construction Workers

Construction is a highly lucrative field, with higher pay and incentives to attract new employees. However, since the COVID-19 pandemic, there remains a disheartening lack of construction workers.

Compared to other industries, the problem is getting worse. A recent report found that there are now [half a million vacancies](#) across the U.S., making it harder for companies to take on the projects needed to stay afloat.

While pandemic layoffs play a large part, other systemic changes contribute to your lack of workers.

Schools Undervalued Skilled Work

Over the past few decades, there has been a cultural shift in the career expectations of graduates. Skilled work became undervalued, with children from middle school told that higher education should take priority over a skilled position.



The average construction worker [is 42 years old](#), which means more young people are needed to replace those retiring from the industry. The attitude around skilled labor in schools is changing for the better, but the scars left from the previous attitude prevent current young adults from applying to industry jobs.

Immigration Policies Changed

Nearly [one-third of construction workers](#) in the U.S. were born in a different country. Immigration policies impact several industries, with construction being one of the largest. It's no secret that the country has a complicated immigration system. Poor processing of work permits and complications remaining from pandemic border shutdowns mean fewer foreigners are looking for work here.

Changing Work Ideals

There has been a change in recent years regarding how people want to work. The rise in remote and flexible working opportunities and technological advancements mean more workers can stay home or adjust their hours. While some employers are combating this trend with guaranteed work hours, construction isn't always able to do that.

More [than two million workers](#) in the industry are self-employed, and the next job is never guaranteed. Though the world always needs construction in one form or another, the idea of an unstable income in an intensive job can be a turn-off.

Being a Project Manager with Few Workers

How can you manage projects with fewer workers? In other industries, the solution could be to expand the hours your team works, but you can't in construction. Forcing workers to stay on sites longer can cause fatigue, leading to life-threatening mistakes. Being tired can lead to poor reaction time and misjudgments about what is safe.

Keeping a Safe Work Environment

Whether you have one or 100 workers on a jobsite, it's vital to ensure their safety. Construction has one of the highest workplace fatality rates in the U.S., with around [12 work-related deaths each day](#). The most common deemed the "fatal four" are the following:

- » **Falls:** From heights or slipping and striking an object.
- » **Impacts:** Something striking the person.
- » **Electrocutions:** From damaged or wet equipment, loose wires, or improperly grounded items.
- » **Getting trapped between two items:** Getting pinned between two items or between an item in the ground.

Keeping your workers alert can help prevent these incidents and keep everyone safe and healthy.

There are other benefits to having a safe environment. When you reduce the risk of injury on a site, you also reduce the chance of a worker needing time off to recover. One study

found that [only 57% of construction workers](#) were able to identify four onsite fatal risks and only 18% were able to locate other injury risks. Regular safety training is essential in ensuring workers can avoid dangerous situations.

Schedule Wisely

With limited workers, it may seem worth having all hands on deck. However, dispersing your work and employees can help you complete the project more efficiently while maintaining safety standards and your budget.

If you're at a stage where workers with different skill sets could get in each other's way, don't keep anyone on a site if it isn't vital. Scatter their schedules so people onsite can focus on their tasks without worrying about potential conflict. For workers on a site, scatter their break and lunch times so there is always some activity happening.

Remember that you're not the only company hurting. Reach out to others in the area for a potential partnership on large projects. Create a [contract that maximizes efficiency](#) and can end once you have a large enough workforce. To keep the relationship professional and get everyone on the same page, you can use the following tips:

- » Use a facilitator.
- » Formally introduce all entities.
- » Introduce a regular feedback system for workers.
- » Regularly meet with your partners to discuss the stage of the project and how your workers' skills can be best used to complete it on time and within budget.

Construction partnerships save money and time, allowing all parties to take on more projects and increase their income.

Recruit

Don't let your projects take away from recruiting efforts. To fill vacancies long-term, you must attract younger workers to your organization. Partnering with local school districts is an excellent way to engage with young people in the area. Seeing your company improve their schools could emphasize the need for construction workers.

You may also be able to work with the district to offer training programs for high school students who want to explore the

industry. You could provide apprenticeships to graduates from those programs, giving them the [on-the-job training necessary](#) for their success.

Research shows [that 77% of workers](#) consider company culture when deciding whether to apply for or accept a position. A culture that values diversity and inclusiveness can also attract employees. Shoot local commercials and submit print ads celebrating an attractive culture that values people of different genders, races, sexual orientations, and more traits.


Practice what you preach. If someone comes to your company because they share your values, it's vital that you actually practice them every day.

Your work reputation also matters. If you're a company with consistent work, you could get more applications since the person can count on long-term work. Offering competitive pay is also vital. If you can't raise the amount you offer, consider implementing other perks, like flexible vacation time or free lunches, until you can raise pay.

Showing how valuable a role in the construction industry is and why your company is one of the best can help you get the best employees.

Managing Projects During a Labor Shortage

There is hope on the horizon. Construction is currently a workers' market, making it likely that more workers will want to dive into the industry. The education industry is also working to correct the former overemphasis on college and let students see the need and skill required to be in construction.

Showing your love for the industry in your recruitment, creating a welcoming and inclusive company culture, working with others in the area, and rethinking worker schedules can help your company grow. 



About the Author

Rose Morrison is a freelance writer with a passion for sustainable building and innovative construction technologies. She has interviewed numerous industry professionals to gain insight into the current challenges facing the built industry and developing strategies for overcoming them. Rose has over five years' experience writing in the industry and is the current managing editor of [Renovated.com](https://www.renovated.com). She also regularly contributes to other publications, such as NCCER, The Safety Mag, and Geospatial World. Follow Rose on [Twitter](#).

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