

Take This Job and Love It

There's Something For Everyone in the Construction Industry

Written by: Lisa Kopochinski, Constructor Magazine

The benefits of working in construction are numerous, and the job opportunities are seemingly endless. Still, as the age demographic of those working in the industry continues to rise, efforts to hire and retain a younger, more diverse workforce intensify. Easier said than done some will say, but when you speak with construction professionals today – those who make the magic happen – you learn there's nothing not to love about this industry.

Constructor recently sat down with three professionals from Harris – a mechanical contractor specializing in design and engineering, construction, building automation, service, manufacturing, conveyors and end-to-end building systems – who took different paths but headed toward the same destination: a rewarding career. Their experiences and words of wisdom should serve as inspiration to those considering construction as a career.

Since opening its doors in 1948 in St. Paul, Minnesota, Harris has grown to 14 regional offices and more than 2,000 employees.

Chad Bestor is a general manager at Harris whose responsibilities include business strategies, employee relations and teambuilding, financial management, sales strategies, labor relations and building management.

Kenny Eastman is a BIM/VDC constructability manager. His work includes promoting modular design and construction,



leadership of project teams, management of CAD/CAM standards and quality control.

Tabitha Lee is a lead building automation system specialist. Her main responsibilities include system testing, BAS design, project management and customer relations.

Here is what these three experts had to say about their chosen profession.

HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN IN THE CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY? WHAT DREW YOU TO THIS INDUSTRY?

Bestor: I have always enjoyed creating something from raw

materials, so design felt like a good fit for a career. In 1997, during my final year of college, I was hired by a mechanical contractor as the company's first computer designer on staff in the Specialty Metals Division. Within my first year I was asked to join the Construction Estimating Division full-time. I took management up on the offer to serve in a different capacity and never stopped asking how I could help the company. That company was acquired by Harris in 2005, where I have remained since. Having that supportive attitude in the beginning led me to take positions as designer, estimator, project manager, and (now) general manager throughout my career.

Eastman: I have over 20 years of construction/engineering experience. I have traveled and implemented construction software all over the world. I'm fascinated by technology and how we can apply it to construction. It's amazing to build something in 3D and then see it being constructed in real life.

Lee: I've been in the construction industry for eight years now. My start was actually by chance. My brother-in-law was working for Harris and a job opened up for a system specialist. I wasn't looking for a job at the time but wanted to at least hear about the position. As I learned more about the role, I wanted to give it a try. One thing that really piqued my interest was being able to take a system from scratch and create a complete system to accomplish a goal.

CONSTRUCTION HAS BEEN A TRADITIONALLY MALE PROFESSION. HAVE YOU ENCOUNTERED ANY OBSTACLES IN YOUR CAREER SPECIFICALLY BECAUSE YOU ARE A WOMAN?

Lee: In the time I have been working in the industry, I have luckily not come across any obstacles. I find that most people give me a chance to prove that I know what I'm talking about and prove that I belong on the construction site. Even when I have questions about the site itself, such as where something is located, it's usually not hard to find someone willing to lend a hand. Most people have an open mind about women working in this industry and seeing women on construction sites.

THE CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY HAS CHANGED WITH THE TIMES, AS MOST INDUSTRIES HAVE. WHAT PART OF THE INDUSTRY DO YOU THINK WILL REMAIN A CONSTANT?

Bestor: One part of the construction industry that will never change is the people in it. It takes hard-working individuals that love what they do to make the construction industry what it was, is, and will continue to be. Another part of the construction industry that will remain the same is the finished product. Yes, the materials, equipment, and tools have improved, but the function of the finished product remains the same.

Eastman: One thing that has remained a constant is using field knowledge to get things installed in the most efficient way. Technology changes to make things easier for construction, but the skill set of understanding construction is a crucial and constant part of our industry.

Lee: I think what has stayed the same is the collaboration between different trades on construction sites. I think this will always remain a constant because as long as companies work together and communicate with each other, everyone will know their part on the construction site. I feel this is a win-win situation for all parties involved.

HOW CAN A COMPANY STRENGTHEN ITS HIRING PIPELINE?

Bestor: The best way to strengthen a company's hiring pipeline is to keep an open eye, cast a large net, and have a reputation that makes people want to work for you. I typically use all the resources I can to search for potential team members. My key resources are our internal Human Capital team, webbased groups such as LinkedIn, and word of mouth.

Eastman: I believe that talent brings talent. Having a great team environment – and leaders who help their team improve – have excellent results.

Lee: I think a company can strengthen its hiring pipeline by getting involved with schools and trade shows to gain exposure to potential candidates and get contact information from those candidates. With social media, companies can get other employees involved in their sites to create a picture of what it's like working at that company. At Harris, for instance, we've introduced an external blog where employees and executives share their personal stories about what led them to the industry, what their responsibilities are and more.

WHAT PROGRAMS OR INITIATIVES SHOULD A COMPANY EMPLOY TO BOLSTER ITS EMPLOYEE RETENTION RATES?

Bestor: I believe it is important to survey the team periodically to find out how we can improve as a company. Anonymous surveys allow team members to express themselves and provide the company with valuable feedback on how to improve employee engagement and happiness. This is typically achieved by forming a Talent & Culture Focus Group. The group can create surveys, collect data, process information, and make recommendations to leadership.

Eastman: Understanding if your employees are satisfied at their current job is very important. Having yearly reviews or employee surveys is a great way to see how things are working. People leave when they are undervalued and unhappy. As a leader it's on you to motivate your team and ensure their success.

Lee: Initiatives and/or programs that promote career development are a big plus. People don't want to feel stuck in the job that they have, and they want to feel like the company values them and their future. I also think people are looking for initiatives that reward personal success. Employees want to feel like they are being recognized for the hard work that helps make the company successful. Another important initiative is to encourage work/life balance. Explore flexible work schedules and foster open dialogue with supervisors and teams.

WHAT ABOUT THE INDUSTRY MAKES YOU HOPEFUL FOR THE FUTURE AND THE NEXT GENERATION ENTERING THE FIELD?

Bestor: Technology, innovation, and safety are the main areas that make me hopeful for the future of the industry. Technology is paving the way for less waste and more efficiency in everything we do. The exacting standards increase every year. We are designing our systems in a 3D environment and are coordinating that design with all other trade partners. This helps eliminate conflicts, resulting in what we build to be correct the first time, every time. We are also prefabricating systems in a UL508A certified shop environment where efficiency and safety are designed into the process. I see innovation happening daily as well, such as with an AR lens where you can load a model and see the finished product as you walk through the space. Other examples include robots

that go through a jobsite and drill in anchors, and exoskeletons which you wear to support your arms for overhead work. The list is endless, but one thing is for sure, the industry will forever continue to change and improve.


Eastman: We're always working on easier ways to build things, and the next generation is thinking about things we haven't even thought of yet. Using current and future technology that people learn at school and then bring to the industry is very exciting.

Lee: What makes me hopeful for the future is how construction is continuing to evolve with technology. For example, BIM modeling is continuing to gain traction and more construction sites are using it to tell if the systems will work in designated spaces. This allows for smoother coordination between all trades and can help projects come in on-time and on-budget. Another example is software suites that allow for project management of construction projects. This can allow construction sites to be streamlined and, in turn, become safer.

WHAT WOULD YOU SAY TO A CONSTRUCTION NEWBIE?

Bestor: Keep your nose to the grindstone and invest your time in learning every aspect of the business. The better your understanding is of what is involved in performing each operation of the company, the more likely you are to be able to guide and align the resource at your fingertips for a successful outcome.

Eastman: Get used to change; it's the one constant you can count on. Don't have the mindset that what you're doing today is the way it will be tomorrow. Make sure you're communicating, too. Communication is one of the best tools you can have.

Lee: Don't be afraid to ask questions. What you learn by asking questions will help you be successful in the future. 



About the Author and Article

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