

Member Communication Experience

We Build Our Construction Managers From Within

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The construction industry spends a great deal of time talking about a talent shortage. In my experience, that is only part of the story.

What we often have is a development shortage.

Every construction management firm is looking for experienced resident engineers, construction managers, and office engineers. Yet many firms overlook a valuable source of future leadership: experienced inspectors who already understand how projects are built, administered, and delivered. They often possess the technical knowledge, judgment, and project experience needed to grow into office engineer and construction manager roles. What they need is a pathway to get there.

At RE Services, a construction management and landscape architecture firm in San Diego, we have made a deliberate decision to develop our future construction managers from within. The [Certified Construction Manager® \(CCM®\)](#) track has become a key part of that strategy, not because of the letters themselves, but because of the body of knowledge they represent.

The goal is not simply certification. The goal is mastery.

Two members of our team illustrate why.

FROM THE TRADES TO CONSTRUCTION MANAGEMENT

Brian Risher's career began in the trades.



Before entering construction management, Brian worked as a mason, ironworker, and superintendent. He learned construction from the ground up, developing an appreciation for craftsmanship, sequencing, quality, productivity, and the realities of building complex projects in the field.

In 2011, after earning his Certified Welding Inspector (CWI) credential, Brian transitioned into construction inspection and construction management. Since then, he has supported major public infrastructure projects across California, including the County of San Diego's largest pavement rehabilitation program, SANDAG's South Bay Bus Rapid Transit project, Caltrans concrete pavement rehabilitation along Interstate 5, and construction management services for Bay Area Rapid Transit's Oakland generator project.

What makes Brian valuable is not simply the breadth of his experience. It is his ability to connect field realities with contract requirements and engineering intent. He understands how projects are designed, how they are built, and where those worlds occasionally collide.

When Brian joined RE Services as an inspector, we quickly recognized that his experience and judgment positioned him for greater responsibility. He earned his [Construction Manager-in-Training \(CMIT®\)](#) credential and has since been approved to sit for the CCM examination. Today, he is actively preparing for that next step while continuing to expand his role on increasingly complex projects.

TWENTY-THREE YEARS LEARNING THE ROAD

Nate Wright's path followed a different route but arrived at a similar destination.

Nate began his career as a laborer before joining the County of San Diego's Department of Public Works. Over the next 23 years, he progressed through nearly every level of the road maintenance organization: Road Maintenance Worker, Equipment Operator, Senior Equipment Operator, Road Crew Supervisor, and ultimately Pavement Manager.

That progression gave him something difficult to teach in a classroom: a practical understanding of how public agencies maintain infrastructure, prioritize limited resources, and make decisions that affect communities every day.

Throughout those years, he also worked alongside consultants and construction managers on capital improvement projects. Those relationships exposed him to another side of project delivery and ultimately gave him the confidence to make a transition of his own. In 2023, after 23 years in public works, Nate left the County for consultant construction inspection, looking for exposure to a wider variety of projects and greater opportunities for professional growth than his role could provide.

He quickly became one of the most trusted inspectors on our team, supporting projects for the City of Encinitas and Caltrans. Like Brian, he brought decades of hard-won knowledge to RE Services and immediately added value. He has since earned his [Certified Associate Construction Manager® \(CACM®\)](#) credential and is now preparing to sit for the CCM examination.

Throughout that process, Brian and Nate have exchanged ideas, shared lessons learned, and challenged one another to think beyond the inspector's role and toward the broader responsibilities of construction management.

That says a great deal about our profession. Two accomplished professionals with decades of real-world experience are still investing in their own growth, because they understand that construction management requires more than technical expertise alone.

DIFFERENT PATHS, SAME PROFESSION

Brian, Nate, and I arrived at construction management from very different directions.

Brian came through the trades. Nate came through public works operations. I came through an engineering education. On paper, our backgrounds have very little in common. I earned a Civil Engineering degree from Manhattan College, became a licensed Professional Engineer, and later completed an MBA. Neither Brian nor Nate followed that traditional path.

Yet all three of us have arrived at the same conclusion: construction management is its own discipline. The path was different. The destination was the same.

A PE demonstrates competency in engineering theory and carries the responsibility of stamping plans. It tells you how something should be designed.

The CCM focuses on what happens after.

Most of what I do daily is not design.

It is managing scope creep before it becomes a claim. Resolving conflicts between contract documents. Evaluating change orders. Reviewing submittals. Processing pay applications. Documenting decisions that may need to withstand scrutiny years after a project is complete.

Construction managers are responsible for navigating contracts, managing risk, coordinating stakeholders, understanding project controls, and delivering successful project outcomes. Those responsibilities are not exclusive to engineers, contractors, inspectors, or owners. They represent a distinct body of knowledge that draws from all of those disciplines.

That is what makes the CCM valuable.

The greatest value of the CCM was never the letters after my name. It was the process of studying for it. The material forced me to examine parts of contract administration, risk management, and project controls that I had previously learned through experience and intuition. It gave structure to what I thought I already knew and made me a better construction manager because of it.

That same framework is now helping guide the development of future leaders within our organization.

CREATING A PATHWAY INSTEAD OF FILLING A VACANCY

Brian and Nate did not begin their careers at RE Services. They arrived with decades of construction and public works experience already behind them. What we saw in both was the potential to take the next step.

Rather than waiting for a construction manager opening and looking outside the firm, we prepare people before the opportunity arrives. An inspector who understands the contract, not just the specifications, becomes a more effective inspector. They understand why requirements exist. They recognize what is enforceable and what is not. They know when to elevate an issue, when to document it, and when to let the contract process do its job.

An inspector who also understands risk management and project controls is better equipped to support the project team. So when the opportunity eventually comes to serve as an office engineer or construction manager, that foundation is already in place.

The result is not just stronger individuals. It is a stronger organization and, ultimately, better outcomes for the clients we serve.

INVESTING IN THE PEOPLE WE ALREADY HAVE

The industry often talks about attracting the next generation of talent. That conversation matters, but so does developing the talent we already have.

Some of tomorrow's construction managers are already working on our projects today. They are documenting quantities, reviewing contract requirements, and coordinating

with contractors as inspectors. The question is whether we provide a pathway for them to grow.

For us, the CCM is part of that pathway. It creates a common professional standard for people who arrive from very different backgrounds. Whether someone's experience comes from engineering, construction, inspection, operations, or public works, the body of knowledge remains the same.

The profession benefits when we recognize that excellence in construction management is not defined by how someone entered the industry, but by their commitment to mastering it.

Brian and Nate have not reached the end of their professional journeys. In many ways, they are preparing for their next chapter, and it is not hard to see where it leads.

Picture Brian as the construction manager on a pavement rehabilitation program, reading the work the way only someone who came up in the trades can, while managing the contract with the discipline the CCM demands. Picture Nate as the office engineer on a SANDAG bikeway, drawing on 23 years of public works operations to anticipate the issues before they reach the field. That combination, deep field experience paired with mastery of the construction management body of knowledge, is exactly what agencies want on a project and exactly what is difficult to hire off the open market.

Their stories demonstrate that construction management talent comes from many different backgrounds, but growth rarely happens by accident. It happens when experience is matched with intentional development.

We are not asking our team to collect credentials. We are asking them to master their craft.

The certificate is just the receipt. 



About the Author

Eric Tallarita, PE, CCM, is a director at [RE Services](#), where he leads project delivery and business development for a growing San Diego-based construction management and landscape architecture firm. Throughout his career, he has helped public agencies and municipalities deliver infrastructure projects more effectively, first as a construction operations manager with the Connecticut Department of Transportation and now as a private-sector leader focused on developing the next generation of construction management professionals.

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