



GET READY, GET SET,



Bring your hard hat and your soft skills—that is the message from the construction industry.

How often have you watched a single home or an entire housing development spring up in a neighborhood and not given a lot of thought to what it takes to construct a home? Take a few minutes to think about how it happens and who makes it happen. More than 100 occupations take part in building the house that you call home. The 100-plus occupations are all careers related to the residential construction industry.

There are a lot of things about the industry that are considered common knowledge. We know that:

- On the jobsite everyone wears a hard hat.
- Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) training is extremely important.
- It takes extensive training to become a skilled craftsman.
- There are also “sit behind a desk” office jobs in construction.
- There are not enough women in the industry.

When talking to young people with an interest in construction, we discuss the enormous opportunities for creating a career path and the potential for making “good” money, and we stress the need for a strong academic foundation. But what about the soft skills? Should we be saying more? Yes, and we are!

What the Industry is Doing

A prime example of teaching soft skill “know how” is the Education in Action Program in Ohio. Mike Mennett, assistant vice president for the Home Builders Association (HBA) in Akron, Ohio, tells us, “Students not only are provided an on-site construction experience but a conduit between school, life and career as well. They learn about building teamwork and what contractors expect from their employees.”

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He goes on to say, “Most important, they have gained pride from their part in providing affordable housing for families in need.”

Students are effectively using soft skills by being exposed to such concepts as teamwork, employer expectations and pride in accomplishments. The Education in Action Program is a partnership with Akron Public Schools, the Home Builders Association serving Portage and Summit Counties, and the Urban Neighborhood Development Corporation, City of Akron. The program has successfully completed 13 homes.

There are specific traits in residential construction that remain constant whether working on a job site or sitting behind a desk. Excellent people skills (communication and listening); scheduling and organization skills; good follow-up skills; and the ability to handle multiple priorities are a few of the essentials. Supervisors at all levels are expected to establish performance expectations, hold people accountable for results and be problem solvers and decision makers.

Ask your students the question, “Do you measure up?” Knowing their best traits is an excellent start for mapping a path for a future career in the industry. For example, California students attending the Building Industry Technology Academy (BITA) program are learning about their best traits. They are exposed to a range of careers from construction trades to management and professional services.

“BITA is a pilot program providing students with practical skills while bringing relevance to high school academic studies and exposing students to the diverse careers that are available in the construction industry,” says Lawrence Jones, director of education for the Building Industry Association of Southern California, Orange County Chapter (BIA/OC).

BITA students are receiving a combination of soft and hard skills to ensure success in the workplace after high school graduation and following postsecondary endeavors.

According to Jones, “Graduates of BITA pursue careers in the trades as well as going on to postsecondary education training at community colleges and four-year universities.”

GET TO WORK!

By C. Deanna Lewis

The Industry Gets Creative

The residential construction industry, like much of today's job market, requires young people to have more analytical reasoning ability and a broader skill base. Along with this comes a deeper understanding of what it means to provide students with "good" soft skills.

Soft skills are more than just saying thank you. Choosing a career is a process that includes assessing all your skills—soft and hard. Our industry is creative about seeking ways to connect students to an extensive range of soft skills that include professionalism, enthusiasm for work, integrity, ethics and initiative.

Nadine Condello, executive vice president of the Home Builders Association of Lincoln, in Nebraska, partners with Junior Achievement (JA) to ensure that students are receiving the necessary skills referenced above.

Regarding the importance of this program, Condello states, "I think some of the most important skills high school students gain from a good program are learning how to interact with adults and to hear directly from the people in the workforce the job skills needed to succeed."

JA Success Skills is a work readiness program and for those in our industry comes with a Home Builders Institute industry-specific career-awareness supplement titled, "Business Ventures in the Residential Construction Industry."

Condello says, "The JA Success Skills program gives students the opportunity to see adults coming into the classroom and willingly volunteering their time. For many students, this may be the most important influence they will have in deciding on a career. Learning from a textbook is important, but a high school student relates to hearing real-life experiences."

Help Your Students to Wear a Hard Hat and Use Soft Skills

Career awareness and exploration start at an early age. When stu-



Students are learning the importance of teamwork on the job site.



dents don't know about career opportunities, they limit their selection tremendously in the job market. When students don't know about the virtues of soft skills, they tend to limit their potential in a successful career.

Don't allow your students to become the employees who wear hard hats and leave their soft skills at home. Soft skills are essential to career success! **T**

For More Construction Career Information

The Home Builders Institute serves as cluster leader for the Architecture and Construction Career Cluster, offering careers in designing, planning, managing, building and maintaining the built environment.

For more information, visit the Home Builders Institute Career Services Web site at www.buildingcareers.org.