The Carpenters apprenticeship training includes a number of different disciplines in which carpentry is involved, and drywall is a major element. The PET (Performance Evaluation Training) program was instituted to achieve consistency in local training programs.

The Ongoing Flow of Apprentices

As the Construction Industry Grows So, Too, Does the Need for a Constant Reservoir of Trained Manpower

If it’s really true that construction in North America will continue in its current growth pattern, then the only way to assure that growth will be by maintaining the availability of a pool of trained, skillful craftpeople.

For centuries, the provision of this vital reservoir of talent has rested with organized labor—whether it was through the traditional Guilds of years past or through the trade union movement of today.

To many wall and ceiling contractors—especially those with a proclivity for operating under agreements with various building trades unions—the greatest benefit they could avail themselves of and offer to customers was a ready source of trained and willing installers. A union contractor had the added capacity to build and reduce his workforce and business commitments with the union, in effect, functioning as a form of personnel department.

Much has changed in the last few years. The open shop and the merit contractor have escalated their competitive stance and are taking careful and deliberate aim on their biggest shortcoming—training. As the non-union sector strengthens its grip in the marketplace and in the training function, the union segment of the construction industry has begun to react.

For wall and ceiling contractors who are union operators the matter of training often involves a number of trade unions so apprenticeship training takes on even more importance. Diversified contractors often involve themselves every day with laborers, painters, carpenters, lathers, and plasterers as the major craft disciplines needed to perform their work.

Accordingly, the Association of Wall and Ceiling Industries-International has negotiated international agreements with virtually all of these unions. With the exception of the laborers, AWCI contractors are also
“Much has changed in the last few years. The open shop and the merit contractor have escalated their competitive stance and are taking careful and deliberate aim on their biggest shortcoming—training.”

deeply involved in the joint committees which are charged with the responsibility of overseeing apprentice training.

For the most part, these joint apprenticeship training committees function along traditional lines. Management and the craft union each are represented on the committees in local and metropolitan areas. To establish uniformity in training, the local committees pretty much follow along the guidelines established by a national joint committee.

The PET (Performance Evaluation Training) program quoted by the United States Brotherhood of Carpenters is a good example of how national guidelines are utilized to give uniformity and excellence in the local training programs.

Not all of the 2,000 locals of the UBC have joint apprenticeship training committees, but where they do exist each local union and district council has gone to great pains to set up a JAC (Joint Apprentice Committee), linking management and the unions.

The members of these committees, as expected, serve as trustees for the program and supervise apprentice standards and programs to make certain that they are in compliance with local and state laws and regulations.

The PET program is the concept that is promoted by UBC to the local JAC’s with the objective of having its standard—and the system itself—incorporated into the local training which involves the 4-year curriculum mixture of training, classroom, actual work experience.

Each of the various carpentry disciplines within the UBC has its own apprentice program of 8000 hours. This comprehensive approach includes the lathing apprentice training program which has been incorporated into the Brotherhood program as one of the so-called TASKS.

Painters Training

The International Brotherhood of Painters and Paperhangers of America (now the International Brotherhood of Painters and Allied Trades—IBPAT) is a prime example of how apprentice training has shifted to meet emerging technology.

Once, the predominant method of construction for ceilings and walls was the plastering method. Then along came drywall—and wall and ceiling work was changed rapidly.

In a few short years drywall technology replaced plaster and the finishing portion for the most part came under the jurisdiction of IBPAT. Because these new materials required
training, early efforts centered around on-the-job training.

Some local Joint Apprenticeship Committees made it part of their curricula and “drywall finisher” apprentices started getting side-trained in painting and decorating. The results, admittedly, were not always good or consistent.

Responding to this shortcoming, the Gypsum Drywall Contractors International (GDCI) later became part of the National Joint Painting, Decorating Apprenticeship Committee, exerting its influence to make training more responsive to job needs.

GDCI later consolidated with IA/WCC (now AWCI). AWCI along with two other “parent” bodies—IBPAT and the Painting & Decorating Contractors of America (PDCA)—make up the NJATC.

Like his counterpart at the Carpenters, James Tinkcom, the administrator of the painters apprenticeship program, Fred C. Thierbach, works full time in all aspects of training, establishing additional programs, and administering the finances.

To conform to Federal laws, the NJATC was implemented by setting up a trust fund, called the National Joint Painting, Decorating and Drywall Apprenticeship and Manpower Training Fund. Trustees of this fund are also members of the National JATC because the fund expends money after reviewing activities of the NJATC. For efficiency, the same 12 people serve on the NJATC and the trust fund.

From the beginning there was always the ambition to expand training to a level consistent with national needs. This goal was not realized until 1968 when the NJATC signed a government contract under the Manpower, Development and Training Act (MDTA, later continued under the Comprehensive Employment Training Act known as CETA).

What this contract did was enable the NJATC to be staffed. In turn this led to the expanded development, monitoring, and followthrough on existing and new training programs and procedures. At the 1969 Brotherhood convention, the “voluntary 1¢ per hour worked” contribution was established. By 1971 there were sufficient funds accumulated to finance the current national staff.

Within a short time a new curriculum had been developed, printed, and distributed, and a library of books and references, slides and narratives and testing packets was made available.

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**Plasterers Training**

For the past two decades there have been between 1,000 and 1,600 apprentices in the training program conducted by the National Plastering Industry’s Joint Apprenticeship program.

Gilbert Wolf, who is the Director for the National Plastering Industry’s JATF, handles plastering and cement masonry training and reports that the main thrust in apprentice training is to teach multiple skills.

To assist in uniformity of training, the plastering JATF has published a full length document listing the specifications of the various training
The PET (Performance Evaluation Training) program promoted by the United Brotherhood of Carpenters is a good example of how national guidelines are utilized to give uniformity and excellence in the local training programs.

In an effort to enhance the plastering and cement masonry trades, a committee for the plasterers and cement masons apprenticeship contest has been named. It hopes to clear the way for a 1984 “Plasterers and Cement Masons International Apprenticeship Contest.”

A poll is now being taken of various local unions across the country to determine if sufficient interest would warrant going ahead.

Actually, the plasterers contest would be the second such program in apprenticeship training.

In the West, drywall contractors and unions are participating in an annual drywall contest where graduating apprentices from more than 13 states come together for a 3-day working competition.

The International Drywall-Acoustical-Interior Systems Contest Committee operates out of Anaheim, CA, and has kept its contest alive for more than 13 years, drawing finances and assistance from local sources. The contest is set up to select the top tapers and the top finishers from among the young apprentices.

Expenses for each of the contestants is paid by the sponsoring organization. The 1984 contest is scheduled to be held in Oklahoma City, OK.

To people from management and from the unions, such contests help to elevate the importance and value of craft training not only to the public at large but among people who may want to investigate getting into an apprentice program.

So long as young men and women with talent and ambition keep flowing into the apprentice programs and then flowing onto work sites as competent professional journeymen and journeywomen, the future of the construction industry is assured.