TRENDS IN TRAINING in the Construction Industry

By John L. Hughes, Jr.
FMI

Driven by rapid changes in demographics and information technology, the construction work force requires immediate and ongoing training. This strategic shift in the industry is reflected in the following top ten trends in construction training for 1992.

1. Long-term momentum is growing for the industry to seriously intensify its training and education efforts. Changing technologies, increased competition and the shrinking labor pool are fueling this need. Training will be used to provide real differentiation for market leaders.

2. Total Quality Management (TQM) is the focus of the decade for contractors seeking to play catch-up with the rest of American industry. Driven by large industrial customers, the leading-edge contractor will implement the quality process. This will, in turn, cause subcontractors and industry suppliers to do likewise. Training is a necessity to improve quality.

3. Training in conjunction with project partnering activities is becoming an accepted industry practice. The focus of this training is team building, issue resolution, problem-solving techniques and communication skills to reduce traditional adversarial relationships.

4. Training at the field level (foremen, superintendents, project managers) is becoming more frequent with the primary emphasis on scheduling, planning and communication skills. Contractors recognize that big productivity and quality payoffs can be realized by training at this level.

5. Training in the areas of customer relations, business development, marketing and sales skills will increase. These skills are the key to survival in a competitive, customer-focused, no-growth market where long-term partnerships, repeat business and differentiation strategies become crucial for success.

6. Expect an increase in demand for professional human resources managers. As more successful firms focus on the benefits from training, experienced human resources managers with training expertise will be required.

7. Expenditures for training activities at all levels will increase in those firms striving to gain a competitive edge. Although the trend is up, the industry lags behind most American businesses in training expenditures per employee. Most contractors currently invest less than $25,000 per year in safety training and $25,000 per year in management/supervisory training.

8. Labor unions are poised for a rebound. Through their training effort and with a well-trained, high-quality work force, unions can take advantage of the labor shortage to increase market share. Look for labor unions to become more “partnering-focused” in their dealings with management.

9. Funding will increase for educational research and development. A number of national construction industry trade associations are establishing educations foundations funded by members and industry suppliers. These not-for-profit organizations are being created to improve technical and business skills in their respective markets. Industry leaders recognize that “business as usual” is no longer acceptable.

10. Training expenditures will be viewed as an ongoing investment for the continuous improvement of safety, quality and productivity. A major beneficial by-product is reduced turnover. One survey indicates that management training reduces turnover by as much as 35 percent.

There is an acceleration of training at all levels of the construction industry, fueled by employees with low skill levels, more sophisticated computer equipment and an immediate need to enhance productivity to stay competitive. Training enhances competitiveness which will ultimately lead to long-term profitability for contracting firms.

About the Author:
John L. Hughes, Jr. is a Vice President of FMI in Raleigh, NC. As manager of FMI’s Sponsored Programs Group, Hughes designs and develops customized training programs for the construction industry. Clients include national trade associations, large contractors, and major manufacturers of building products and construction equipment.

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