

Attracting Young People Into Construction Field Positions

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Prepared for
The Foundation of Wall and Ceiling Industry

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Preface

Foundation of the Wall and Ceiling Industry

In the late 1970s, there was a clear recognition among industry leaders for the need to unite and expand the educational and research activities available to contractors, manufacturers, distributors and the public, in general. At the time, there were many issues facing the industry—from a national energy crisis to injuries in the workplace, to unsafe buildings occupied by the public. In response to these issues, the Foundation of the Wall and Ceiling Industry was formed in 1977 with the following mission statement as an IRS designated non-profit 501(c)3 corporation to pursue educational and research activities benefiting the industry and the public at-large:

The Foundation's mission is to be an active, unbiased source of information and education to support the wall and ceiling industry.

To fulfill this mission, the Foundation owns and maintains the largest independent library serving the wall and ceiling industry, provides research support to industry inquiries and publishes research papers. In addition, the Foundation provides financial assistance through its AWCI Cares program to AWCI member company employees experiencing hardship.

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Table of Contents

What to Take Away from This Report	7
Overview	8
Young People.....	8
Recommendations	9
Action Step 1: Communicate	9
Action Step 2: Promote Technology.....	9
Action Step 3: Emphasize People	9
Action Step 4: Develop Strategies.....	10
Action Step 5: Target the Right Group.....	10
Occupational Outlook	11
Employment for Young People Today	11
Construction Employment Outlook	12
Competing Industries	14
How to Attract and Keep Young People	15
The Current Labor Pool	15
Where to Find Candidates	16
Selling Young People on Construction	17
Other Findings	17
Motivations.....	17
More on Compensation	17
Final Encouragement	19
Appendix	19
Bibliography	20

What to Take Away from This Report

Today's youths are the future and the future of the wall and ceiling industry. Gen Me, Gen Y, the millennials—call them what you will, we need them. Ranging in age from 10 to 30, they comprise about 80 million people. As they seek to enter the workforce, will they consider work in construction field positions? Do young people know what wall and ceiling construction has to offer? What should be the industry's pitch?

This paper interviews generational and occupational experts, presents the views of executives in the wall and ceiling industry, features sources of data and reviews recently published works, including books, blogs and news articles.

Here are this paper's five take-away points:

1. Young people thrive on regular communication. They enjoy collaborating on teams. Mentoring programs will encourage them to stay on board with your company.

2. What matters to a young person about work differs from older generations. Young people enjoy technology, and the construction industry is using

more of it. Experts recommend appealing to young people's interest in technology.

3. Company culture is important. Young people want jobs that come with perks and "come and go as you like" atmospheres, which are common among high-tech firms. To be appealing, construction firms need to create "good fit" cultures.

4. Develop new recruitment strategies. Long-term employment forecasts are positive, so industries will be competing to fill entry-level positions. Is the construction industry ready to recruit a prime crop of youth? They can be by gearing up in this area.

5. The construction industry needs to target the right group of young people for field positions—those out of high school but not in college. An older group attending two-year community college programs is an up-and-coming recruitment target; they have tried a career path or two and are ready to settle down.

The overriding conclusion is that successful construction companies need to think of themselves not so much as builders, but as talent developers.

Overview

YOUNG PEOPLE

The Millennial Generation

This paper defines young people in broad terms. About 80 million youths, roughly between the ages 10 and 30, will be in the workforce for decades.¹ They have been called Generation Me, Generation Y and the millennial generation. Each term refers to the same group.² (See the Appendix article, “More on The Millennials.”)

What Is at Stake?

Eighty million is a big number. At first, it may seem like there are plenty of potential employees from which to draw recruits. But, the competition to hire a 10-year-old 10 years from now is going to be plenty. For this reason, occupational experts say that now is the time to begin preparing to recruit future workers.

“The mindset has to completely change. It’s not about drywall. It’s about the talent that puts up the drywall,” Mark Breslin, an expert in construction leadership, strategy and labor-management relations and founder of Breslin Strategies, Inc., Alamo, Calif. “You are in the business of talent development. If you don’t view it that way, one day you’ll realize you can no longer go to the market and readily source people—they’re not going to be there. If you don’t have a game plan, you’re going to suffer. It’s going to show up in supervision, and it’s going to show up in the composition of your workforce.”

What Are Young People’s Main Characteristics?

Here are the main attitudes and outlooks associated with young people today:

Me-first. Jean M. Twenge, Ph.D., brings out a different side of young people by calling them “Generation Me.” In her book, “Generation Me,” Twenge writes about young people who are now in their 20s and 30s. As the Gen Me label implies, they are self-absorbed. But they don’t view this as a problem. “[Gen Me] grew up in an era,” she says, “when focusing on yourself was not just tolerated but actively encouraged.”³

I am unique. Young people, and their parents, prize being unique. In “The Narcissism Epidemic—Living in the Age of Entitlement,” Twenge (author of “Generation Me”) says that the American emphasis on uniqueness is “a cultural construct that most of us take for granted.”⁴ But, millennials have been told all along that they are special—the idea being, supposedly, that this would help them to develop a healthy self-identity.

Coddled. An AWCI’s Construction Dimensions article sums up young people by saying: “Millennials had overly busy childhoods that lacked lessons on hard work and performance. Instead, they got praise. By growing up with text-messaging technology and online networking ... they crave communi-

cation and accolades. Millennials have been chatting their whole lives and expect speedy feedback.”⁵

Team-oriented. Breslin says young people have the potential to be excellent team players. He says the key is to “motivate them properly, which is through positive reinforcement and coaching.”

Interested in learning. Dina Cipollaro-Beck, a generational expert and trainer with Fundamental Training Solutions, South Lake Tahoe, Calif., points out that young people crave guidance. She says young people want help to learn how to perform the job they’ve been hired to do. Mentoring is important in keeping them on board with the company.

Interested in finding their niche. “We get some young people who want to be the next foreman. They want to run the next big job. They want to be ‘the Guy,’” says Tim Wies, president of T.J. Wies Contracting, Inc., St. Louis, Mo. “But others just want to be a worker bee. Both are valid. You need both of them.” Wies’ conclusion is that construction companies need to develop corporate cultures that promote from within. “You make sure that you train the young guys to move up the ladder,” he says. “But you respect their opinions on where on the ladder they want to stop.”

Communication Is a Central Theme

Communication is important for young people. In fact, communication is a central theme for them. Here are three points to note:

For young people, communication means collaboration. “Our company culture is big on open communication,” says Craig Daley, president, Daley’s Drywall & Taping, Campbell, Calif. “The young workforce today doesn’t want to be treated like mushrooms. They need to feel part of the team. They are informed about the budgets and how we’re doing.”

For young people, communication implies regular, systematic training. “The industry needs training,” says Michael Heering, president, F.L. Crane & Sons, Inc., Fulton, Miss. “We try to do on-the-job training, but I think that if we had more training facilities—and hats off to the unions, because they do that—we’d retain more field-level people, especially the young guys, who really like it.”

For young people, communication involves the use of social media. Social media networking will play an important role in future recruitment. “Facebook and LinkedIn are becoming the primary ways of recruiting talent in America right now,” Breslin says. “It’s not Craigslist anymore. It’s definitely not newspapers. It’s social media. Now that’s a problem, because most people in older generations have no idea what it’s about. They may need to hire a consultant to assist them in crafting recruitment strategies through social media.”

Recommendations

This paper draws five conclusions on how construction companies can attract young people to construction field positions of work. Based on those conclusions, here are five action-steps that construction companies can begin taking:

ACTION STEP 1: COMMUNICATE

Build a recruitment, training and career development program based on open communication.

Experts tell us that today's young people thrive on communication. They like to be mentored and they need to feel cared for. Wall and ceiling firms that have programs and policies built around these ideals will find young people to be great team players.

"Even though they're young, they want their ideas to be respected," Cipollaro-Beck says. "They're not looking for a chain of command at the workplace. They're looking for collaboration. They want to be a part of a team."

For young people, "open communication" implies that companies do the following:

- Provide clear job expectations and career development paths.
- Readily explain all job site rules, procedures and policies.
- Provide regular job training and career development opportunities, especially through workshops and mentoring.

"We are big on making sure they're all trained well," Daley says. "They're getting certificates for operating different equipment and safety. They go through all of the blueprint training. They need to be trained, and they need to know that there's more than just the job I'm doing today."

What You Can Do Now

Set up a mentoring program. Partner your young recruit with someone who has been on the job for a while, someone they can relate to and talk to about their day.

Publish goal targets that when achieved will result in job promotion. Make clear to young people that if they accomplish A, B and C, then they will be due for a pay raise and a promotion. Spell out each step and each requirement.

Put a system in place to provide regular feedback to young people. Make this a two-way conversation. That is, solicit their input, listen carefully to it and acknowledge it. Make them feel like genuine collaborators on the project. Tell them exactly how they are performing.

ACTION STEP 2: PROMOTE TECHNOLOGY

Promote technology when pitching construction jobs to young people.

Young people enjoy technology. They readily keep abreast of advances in consumer electronics, personal computing, mobile communications and Internet technologies. They have been called the Techno Generation, which speaks to their comfort level in using devices, software and online networks.

Sources say that technology—more than wages and salary, flexible work days and other job satisfaction parameters—can be a trump card in gaining the attention of young people, cultivating their interest in construction field positions and counteracting preconceived views that construction work is strictly low-tech and physical.

"Our work has become technical with all the onscreen take-offs that we do," Heering says. "Yes, there is manual labor. But there is a lot of automation and a lot of cool, new tools. That's what we have to show in order to entice."

"Maybe all we need is a simple video. It could have pictures, or be a short movie, or a series of YouTube videos that show the lasers and total layout systems that we use in the field," Heering says. "You start showing that to these people, and all of a sudden they're saying, 'I'd be a laser technician.'"

"Our local association, the Wall And Ceiling Alliance, and AWCI could put together information that talks about the benefits of being in the trades with an emphasis on the technology we use," Daley says. "Our company is implementing a paperless foreman system where the guys have tablets with time cards, work orders, production tracking, even the plans and specs and scope sheets. Everything to track the job on a daily basis is on a tablet. That type of technology would interest someone who thinks they need to work for Google."

What You Can Do Now

Publish the technology that you use. Most smartphones come equipped with high-resolution cameras. Take pictures of your employees using lasers, tablets and CAD software. Post the photos to your website, blog and social media networks.

Set up a social media-focused recruiting team. Social networks, such as LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter, make it easy to share photos, and young people are adept at using these sites to learn about careers and find job leads. You want a team reaching out to young people via these sites, recruiting for the firm and dropping photos of the technology the firm uses into their tweets and posts.

Ask industry associations to supply some materials. Both national and local trade associations may be able to help create slide presentations, videos, infographics and other media that would feature the industry's use of technology in the field.

ACTION STEP 3: EMPHASIZE PEOPLE

Cultivate a company culture that is comfortable with flexible rules and that emphasizes people over production. Today's

young people come to work with a different mindset than those of prior generations. Young people are “not motivated by feelings of duty,” says the book “Generation Me” (p. 217). This perspective has to be acknowledged by any company hoping to appeal to millennials. The key is to shape a company culture that allows for a measure of flexibility and independence on the part of work crew members.

“[Young people] don’t respond well to micromanagement, and will find rigid schedules stifling,” writes Twenge in *Generation Me* (p. 218). She adds further: “Gen Me loves doing their own thing and will like working at a place that values this.” The book, *Generations at Work*, advises that company recruiters “include the phrase ‘we want you to have a life’ at least three times during the [job] interview.”

Of course, adapting a construction company’s current culture to millennials won’t be easy to do.

“We’re a ‘kick you in the butt’ and ‘get your act together’ industry,” Breslin says. “Young people can be productive. They just require significantly more coaching, mentoring and instruction, and the industry is not built for it. We’re used to throwing recruits on the job site and seeing if they can make it. That’s not going to work anymore.”

What You Can Do Now

Be ready to have your authority questioned. Young people will generally raise questions when something is unclear. They appreciate directness, rather than abstraction. So, train your supervisors and foremen to be ready for this. They need to view queries not as a direct challenges, but as requests for clarification—RFCs.

Set up a suggestion box. This is an old idea. But today it’s become critical to have one. Young people feel free to make suggestions. And, they will be inclined to remain with the company if they feel that their suggestions are received and acted upon.

Redefine what constitutes “hard work.” Young people are willing to work hard, experts say. But, they may show up late for work, more so than other generations would, or they may take breaks for to handle phone calls and messaging. How will your crew leaders respond? It will help to show flexibility, especially if the work is getting done. So, find ways to make flexibility—not a lowering of quality or production standards, but an accommodating spirit—part of your company’s culture.

ACTION STEP 4: DEVELOP STRATEGIES

Develop new recruitment strategies. By 2020, much of the construction workforce in America will be replaced. It is important for construction companies to handle this shift strategically, rather than reactively.

“If you just make it about filling the job site and with no

thought to strategic talent procurement, it will be a disaster,” Breslin says. “Gen Y has a completely different view of the workplace and of the work experience than the people they’re replacing. Bringing them in to just ‘fill’ positions is, in my opinion, a serious roll of the dice.”

New recruitment strategies need to address the following:

- Naming a talent director.
- Identifying where best to find recruits.
- Setting standards for evaluating candidates.
- Doing a thorough interview-evaluation process.
- Providing a job preview so candidates don’t become disenfranchised if the job turns out to be different from their expectations.
- Understanding the importance of social media as a recruitment tool.

“There’s a difference between attracting candidates and attracting high-caliber candidates, and there will be profound difficulties in securing high-caliber candidates in the future,” Breslin says. “In many instances, we get people applying to construction as a last resort. We do not need those people in our industry. When it’s busy we take them in. When it’s not busy we’re stuck with them. We’ve been unable to determine the level of competence and upfront qualifications that we want in someone that we’re going to invest in a 20- or 30-year career. We pay the price for it.”

What You Can Do Now

Put somebody in charge of talent development. This can be a human resources director, but a field leadership person might make the effort more meaningful.

Identify best practices for hiring high-caliber people. Revamp your interview process. Include questions that assess a candidate’s situational judgment capacity—i.e., “What would you do if...?”, “Tell us about a time when you encountered What did you do?” Try to assess a candidate’s “learning capacity.”

Use social media to recruit. Sign up to use social media networks and begin having professional engagements on them.

ACTION STEP 5: TARGET THE RIGHT GROUP

Target the group of young people that is right for construction. Where can the construction industry find candidates for field positions? The greatest potential seems to be with high schoolers and community college and junior college attendees. (See the Appendix article, “College credit for apprentice schooling.”)

“The absolute number one best place to be looking, which is generally overlooked or ignored, is the junior college system,” Breslin says. “The reason is this: The statistics on people who come out of high school is, I believe, that three out of 10 don’t finish high school in America. Only two or three of the remaining will complete a four-year university. What you have is two or three individuals out of 10 looking for something beyond high school,” Breslin says. “They’re a little bit older. They’re a little bit more mature. Now some of them will decide they’re no longer interested in junior college, and they’ll need a job right then and there.”

“We may go back to the high schools, but I’m thinking more of going back to the trade schools. The majority of those guys want to work with their hands and have no intentions of going to college,” says F.L. Crane & Sons’ Heering. “We may set up shop at the vo-tech for an hour, talk to people and show them where they can go.”

“Rural kids know how to work—plain and simple,” says Wies. “We have a standing rule that if a kid comes off of a farm, think about offering him a job. If he comes off of a dairy farm you hire him on the spot. He milked cows twice a day. He knows how to get up early. We don’t have to teach him responsibility. He comes with that skill set.”

What You Can Do Now

Identify candidates at high schools early. Reach out to guidance counselors and vocational technology teachers for leads among young people who like technology and working with their hands.

Have a presence at community colleges. Students here are often older and more settled. They have likely held more than a few jobs, so their interest in construction can be taken to be sincere.

Look for young people with an established strong work ethic. Someone slightly older, possibly raised on a farm or who likes to work with their hands is often a natural fit with construction firms.

Occupational Outlook

EMPLOYMENT FOR YOUNG PEOPLE TODAY

Current Occupational Outlook for Young People

millennials have a lot on their minds at the moment largely because they face one of the toughest economic environments to come in decades.

A figure published by Mauldin Economics in November 2012 pegs unemployment in the United States for youths ages 15 to 24 at more than 17 percent.⁶

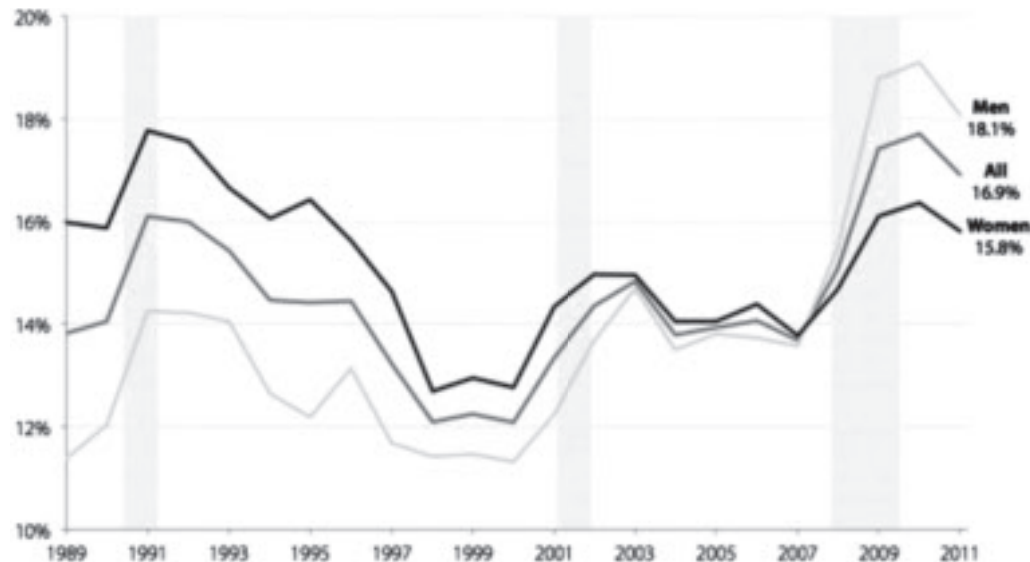
The Economic Policy Institute states that the unemployment rate for young high school graduates was 32.7 percent in 2010 and 31.1 percent from April 2011 to March 2012. (EPI defines high school graduates as being between the ages of 17 and 20.) High school graduate underemployment was even higher—55.9 percent in 2010 and 54.0 percent from April 2011 to March 2012.⁷

According to the Young Entrepreneur Council, about 1.5 million bachelor’s degree holders age 25 or younger or 53.6 percent were unemployed or underemployed in 2011—one out of two college graduates.⁸

“The college class of 2012 is in for a rude welcome to the world of work,” wrote the Associated Press.⁹

Potential Field Workers

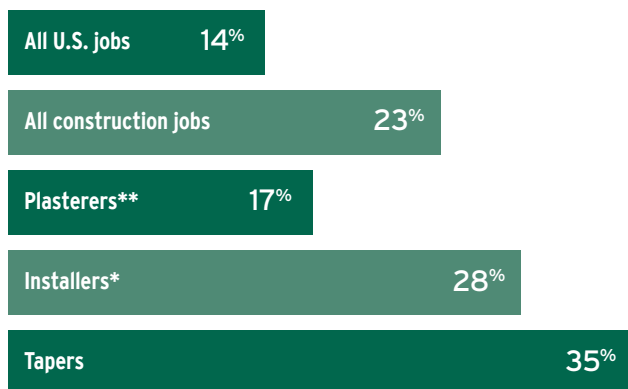
Share of young high school graduates not enrolled in college or a university and not employed, 1989–2011



Shaded areas denote recessions. Data are for high school graduates age 17–20. Source: Economic Policy Institute analysis of Current Population Survey micro data.

Drywall and Ceiling Industry Job Growth

Percent change in employment, projected 2010–2020



*Drywall and ceiling tile installers

**Plasterers and stucco masons

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Studies, Employment Projections program

Affect of Weak Economy on Millennials

Such news is having a negative effect. Cipollaro-Beck explains that the speed at which millennials are able to consume news and information—through social media and mobile technology—creates a “deeper level of experience” for them than traditional media outlets do with other generations. Today’s young people are somewhat discouraged.

“I’ve read that this generation has been calling themselves ‘Vexed’ due to the fact that they have to downplay their goals, downplay their dreams,” Cipollaro-Beck says. “Basically, they are going to be looking at where there are jobs. That’s a concern for this generation. It’s an unknown for them.”

Cipollaro-Beck says younger millennials are “going to be living at home longer.” Their parents will be involved in their millennial children’s job search and placement activities—more so than was the case with older millennials and with other generations.

So young people are facing a difficult job market at present. But in the near future, the economy is expected to turn a corner and improve. The construction industry, as well as other industries, will experience significant growth in jobs availability.

Jobs Forecast

Total employment is expected to increase by 20.5 million jobs from 2010 to 2020, with 88 percent of detailed occupations projected to experience employment growth, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics’ Occupational Outlook Handbook.¹⁰

Here are some highlights from the report and from other sources:

- Industries and occupations related to health care, personal care and social assistance, and construction are projected to have the fastest job growth between 2010 and 2020.
- Jobs requiring a master’s degree are expected to grow the fastest, while those requiring a high school diploma will experience the slowest growth over the 2010–2020 time frame.
- Slower population growth and a decreasing overall labor force participation rate are expected to lead to slower civilian labor force growth, the government report says.

CONSTRUCTION EMPLOYMENT OUTLOOK

Construction Field Positions

Employment of construction workers is expected to grow 22 percent, adding about 1.4 million new jobs over the 2010–2020 period. Construction trades and related workers, such as carpenters, painters, and plumbers, will account for about 1.1 million of these jobs, states the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics’ Occupational Outlook Handbook. Gains will be widespread throughout this group, with construction laborers, carpenters and electricians experiencing significant increases in employment.

Employment Projections for Drywall and Ceiling Tile Installers and Tapers

Occupational Title	SOC Code	Employment, 2010	Proj. Employment, 2020	Change, 2010–2020
Drywall Installers, Ceiling Tile Installers, and Tapers		129,600	166,900	29%, +37,300 jobs
Drywall and Ceiling Tile Installers	47-2081	106,700	136,000	28%, +29,400 jobs
Tapers	47-2082	22,900	30,900	35%, +8,000 jobs

SOURCE: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Employment Projections program

Construction Laborers and Helpers Job Growth

Percent change in employment, projected 2010–2020

All U.S. jobs 14%

All construction jobs 23%

Construction laborers 21%

Construction helpers 40%

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Studies, Employment Projections program

Drywall and Ceiling Tile Installers and Tapers

By 2020, the number of drywall and ceiling tile installers and tapers will reach 166,900 jobs in the United States. It represents a projected growth of 29 percent—a projected increase in jobs for the wall and ceiling industry much faster than the average for other occupations.

As construction activity rebounds, drywall will continue to be the most common interior wall covering in nearly every building, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics'

Occupational Outlook Handbook.¹¹ As a result, new building construction will drive demand for workers, including 35 percent employment growth for drywall tapers (22,900 jobs in 2010 to 30,900 projected jobs in 2020) and 28 percent employment growth for installers (106,700 jobs in 2010 to 136,000 projected jobs in 2020).

The fact that available jobs in drywall and ceilings are projected to grow faster than available jobs growth in general means that wall and ceiling firms will be pressed to recruit hard and effectively to fill their positions.

Construction Laborers and Helpers

From 2010 to 2020, the number of construction laborers is expected to grow 21 percent, faster than the average for all occupations.

- Laborers work in all fields of construction, including building roads, bridges and water lines.
- Helpers are trade specific. The government says that their opportunities will vary by trade.

According to the Occupational Outlook Handbook—Construction Laborers and Helpers, for example, carpenters' helpers should have the best job prospects, while painters', paper-

Employment Projections for Construction Laborers and Helpers

Occupational Title	SOC Code	Employment, 2010	Proj. Employment, 2020	Change, 2010-2020
Construction Laborers and Helpers		1,250,200	1,564,400	25%, +314,200 jobs
Construction Laborers	47-2061	998,800	1,211,200	21%, +212,400 jobs
Helpers—Brickmasons, and Tile and Marble Setters	47-3011	29,400	47,000	60%, +17,600 jobs
Helpers—Carpenters	47-3012	46,500	72,400	56%, +25,900 jobs
Helpers—Electricians	47-3013	73,500	96,000	31%, +22,500 jobs
Helpers—Painters, Paperhangers, Plasterers, and Stucco Masons	47-3014	11,900	14,500	22%, +2,600 jobs
Helpers—Pipelayers, Plumbers, Pipefitters, and Steamfitters	47-3015	57,900	84,200	45%, +26,300 jobs
Helpers—Roofers	47-3016	12,700	13,900	10%, +1,200 jobs
Helpers, Construction Trades, All Other	47-3019	19,600	25,200	29%, +5,600 jobs

SOURCE: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Employment Projections program

hangers', plasterers' and stucco masons' helpers will likely find fewer job openings.¹²

Employment projections for construction laborers and helpers from 2010 to 2020, will reach a total of 1,564,400, an increase of 314,000 jobs, or 25 percent. Carpenters' helpers, for example, will grow by 25,900 jobs, or 56 percent.

The fact that available jobs in construction in general, and also in the wall and ceilings construction industry, are projected to grow faster than the overall jobs growth in the United States means that construction firms will be challenged in the area of hiring and retention.

COMPETING INDUSTRIES

Occupational Outlook

Employment in construction is expected to rise 33 percent by 2020, adding about 1.8 million jobs, according to the government. Even so, the construction industry was hit hard by the recession, losing 2.2 million jobs from 2006 to 2010. Despite the fast projected growth rate, employment in the industry is not expected to recover to its pre-recession level by 2020.¹³

The employment shift in the U.S. economy away from goods-producing in favor of service-providing industries is expected to continue. Service industries are anticipated to generate nearly 18 million new jobs.

Clearly, other industries will be competing with construction to hire young people for available positions between now and 2020. "You don't want to be the last one to the gate trying to get these kids," Heering says.

The Fastest Growing Job Sectors

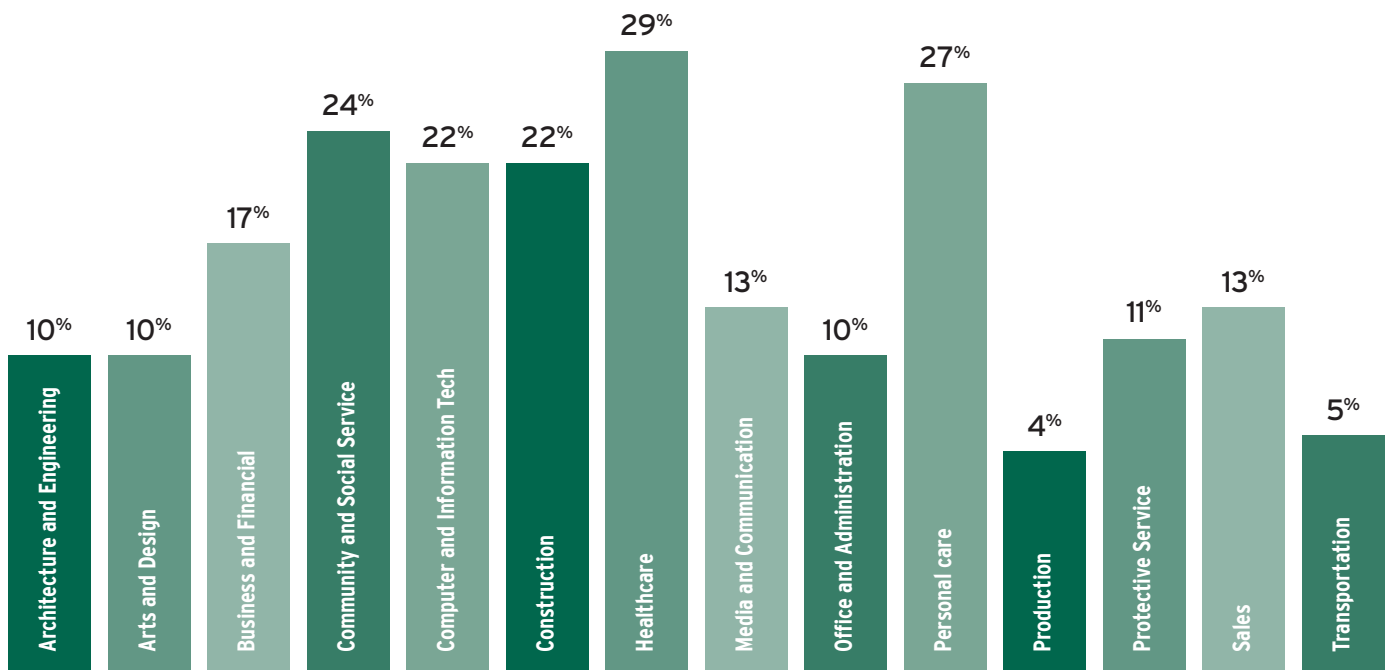
What other industries will be growing the fastest in terms of employment? Here are the Top 5 fastest growing U.S. occupations 2010–2020 as projected by the Occupational Outlook Handbook:¹⁴

Healthcare. Jobs in this sector are expected to increase by 29 percent by 2020—a projected 3.5 million new positions, driven by increasing demand for healthcare services. Two occupations are expected to add a substantial number of jobs: registered nurses (26 percent growth in jobs, \$64,690 median annual wage) and home health aides (70 percent growth in jobs, \$20,170 median wage).

Personal care. Jobs in this occupational group are anticipated to grow by 27 percent through 2020, adding more than 1.3 million jobs. As consumers become more concerned with health, beauty and fitness, the number of cosmetic and health spas will rise, causing an increase in demand for workers in this group. Personal care aides (70 percent growth in jobs, \$19,640 median wage) and childcare workers (20 percent increase in jobs, \$19,300 median wage) will account for nearly two-thirds of the group's new jobs.

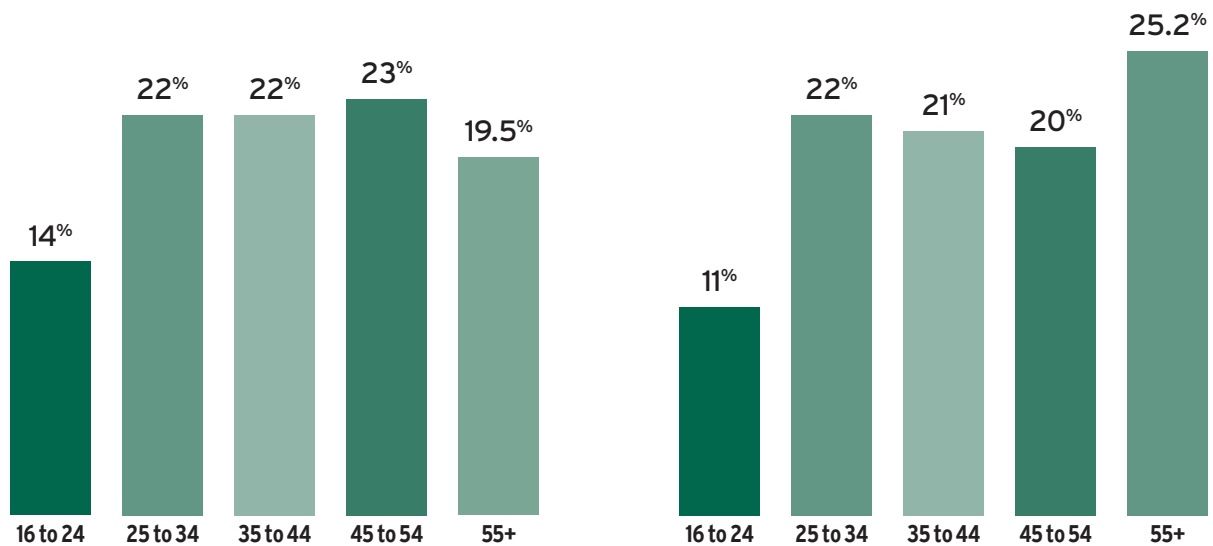
U.S. Jobs Growth by Employment Sectors – Selected List

Percent change in total employment, by occupational group, projected 2010–2020



Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Studies, Employment Projections program

Percent of the Labor Force by Age Group
2010 (left set of bars) versus 2020 projected (right set of bars)



Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Studies, Employment Projections program

Community and social services. Opportunities are projected to increase by 24 percent or by 582,300 jobs. Social and human services assistants (28 percent jobs growth, \$28,200 median wage) will be needed to provide mental and behavioral health treatment and social services for the elderly.

Computer and information technology. Jobs are projected to grow by 758,800 from 2010 to 2020. Demand for computer systems analysts (22 percent growth in jobs, \$77,740 median wage) will be driven by businesses, government agencies and other organizations that need to develop software, increase cyber security and update existing network infrastructure.

Construction and extraction. This category, which includes drywall and ceiling construction, is expected to grow by adding about 1.4 million new jobs over the 2010–2020 period. Construction trades and related workers, such as carpenters, painters and plumbers, will account for about 1.1 million of these jobs. Gains will be widespread throughout this group, with construction laborers (22 percent jobs growth, \$29,280 median wage), carpenters and electricians experiencing significant increases in employment.

How to Attract and Keep Young People

THE CURRENT LABOR POOL

Education and Availability

The chapter titled, *Ending High School as We Know It*, from the book “Escaping the Endless Adolescence,” documents

how most teens drop out of the education system well before attaining a degree or even a certificate.¹⁵

Here are some statistics: For every 100 students entering the 9th grade, only 68 will obtain their high school diplomas four years later. Of those 68, 40 will attend college. But after one year only 27 will still be enrolled in college. In the end, only 18 of the original 100 9th graders will finish college with either an associate’s degree or a bachelor’s degree.

Many unemployed young people are also not attending college. An Economic Policy Institute chart shows that of every 100 unemployed high school graduates, 18 men and 16 women are also not attending college or university.

“The lack of a Great Recession-fueled increase in college or university enrollment, combined with the lack of job prospects, means a large share of young high school graduates are now ‘disconnected,’ neither enrolled nor employed,” states an EPI Web post.¹⁶

The Immigration Debate

The availability of an immigrant pool of field workers is, at the time of this writing, undetermined. It’s possible that millions of illegal immigrants may be given a path to citizenship under a provision fashioned by some members of the U.S. Senate.¹⁷

According to the Senate proposal, most people in the country illegally now could qualify for legal status and work permits, provided they meet certain standards. The Senate proposal comes alongside plans that President Barack Obama has in store.

“We need to think about the issue of immigration reform. The workforce for a lot of the construction industry is Hispanic. A lot of people working in our industry may have had issues relative to their status, just to be realistic about it,” Breslin says. “Wall and ceiling has a high proportion of Hispanic workers. So, employers should be paying close attention to both making sure that the people that they have and the people they want are working hard to obtain the right status. That’s one of the main pipelines of the workforce.”

In short, worker availability for drywall and ceiling construction could change depending on the outcome to the current immigration debate.

Mobility of Young People

Are young people willing to move to find jobs? Cipollaro-Beck says that, in general, young people are prone to stay close to home. But this tendency changes when they associate a move with a sense of adventure, she says.

“It’s related to extreme sports, which they’ve been around—the X Games, and so forth. They like adventure,” Cipollaro-Beck says. “They also like knowing that they’re going to be a part of something. So, if a construction company can promote their business with a sense of adventure, I think that is going to be a positive in their court.”

So, construction companies looking for young field workers from outside their areas may need to have some story messaging to their recruitment efforts. “Millennials don’t want a boring job,” Cipollaro-Beck says. “They want to be entertained. They’ve been entertained their whole life by the media and by Facebook and Twitter.”

WHERE TO FIND CANDIDATES

Traditional Recruitment Channels

Where can the construction industry go to find candidates for field positions? Sources cite a number of options to pursue, with some proving more valuable than others.

High schools. Young people of high school age have been a traditional source of recruits for construction field positions. Lately, however, some construction firms have felt a need to find other conduits to help fill their field positions.

“Let’s say our return on our investment [in high school recruiting] has not been very good,” Heering says. “They [young people in high school] are looking for something else. Construction is not something that jumps out at them.”

Word of mouth. For many construction companies, word of mouth serves as the strongest source for finding recruits. Finding good, quality employees is about bringing in friends

and family members for an interview. This is especially true in the immigrant and rural communities.

“In California, we have a large labor pool from Mexico and from farm help that ends up migrating into construction, which is certainly a step up for them,” Daley says. “We just need to get the word out and we will do well—better than campus recruiting or outright advertising.”

Emerging Recruitment Channels

Community colleges. “Two-year community colleges is another one that we haven’t started hitting. We’ve got trade colleges. They’re above a secondary school vo-tech program. They’re a post-high school, vo-tech type program,” Wies says. “I think that’s a fertile ground. I know the mechanical and electrical trades are using them quite a bit. We’re looking into that. Probably at the next boom we’re going to be jumping in and getting involved with them.”

Social media. Social media networks have become key channels for reaching young people so as to recruit them. At the time of this writing, LinkedIn had 200 million users worldwide, Google+ had 400 million users, Facebook had 1 billion users, YouTube has 800 million users and Twitter has 500 million users.¹⁸

It is not the purpose of this paper to provide specific recommendations with regard to social media business recruiting use. Suffice it to say that social media is where young people research job opportunities and carry on discussions about career choices and job postings.

The book, *Dancing With the Digital Natives*, explains the development of the online job posting marketplace and how it has changed radically since first emerging. The book states that thousands of job boards exist. The main ones include monster.com, Career Builder and Yahoo! Here is the take-away:

- Traditional online job boards all function more or less like a digitized version of a newspaper’s employment section, with a few added functionalities.
- In all probability, however, job boards will cease to exist in the future.
- The model is outdated, and social technologies have transformed the recruitment process forever.¹⁹

The new way to look at a job search is as a people search.²⁰ Conducting a people search means that a young person would identify the top companies they want to work for and engage people employed at those companies via social media. They strive to form positive relationships, and this leads to employment prospects. The contact at the employer actually performs the job search for the young person by checking on job availability.

Someone, or several persons, at the construction company needs to be actively engaging with the recruiting field. Here is the take-away:

- Social networking sites (Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter) put everyone on the same plane.
- Social networking sites give young people access to employers who can offer them jobs.
- The key, according to *Dancing With the Digital Natives*, is for each firm to form a team of digitally inclined employees to use social networks freely and to function as recruitment facilitators.²¹

SELLING YOUNG PEOPLE ON CONSTRUCTION

What Construction Firms Have to Offer

Decent wages. In general, construction companies offer good pay. “A carpenter in our area [St. Louis] who works 2,000 hours a year is going to make \$64,000 to \$65,000,” Wies says.

No student loans. “Kids from rural areas are used to working with their hands, and they’re kids who really don’t want to go to school anymore,” Wies explains. “Your sales point to them is, ‘By the time some of your classmates graduate from college with \$100,000 worth of debt, you’re making \$65,000 a year. You’re going to an apprentice school. You’re getting paid while you’re getting an education.’”

Working with one’s hands. The appeal of construction is that one can leave a tangible mark when they complete their work. “There’s very few jobs where, at the end of the day, you can turn around, look at the progress made and say, ‘I’ve left something here that my grandchildren are going to see,’” Wies says. “If you’re an accountant, at the end of the day your accomplishment is that everything that was in your Inbox is now in your Outbox. We can appeal to young people. It’s a good living, and it’s rewarding.”

Benefits. Most construction companies offer decent benefits packages. “We have 401(k)s. We have health insurance. We’re an ESOP company where they own shares of the company,” Heering says. “We have as much or more than most in the manufacturing industry in our area [Mississippi].”

What Construction Firms Need to Add to Their Job Offers

A clear career path. Experts say that today’s young people respond better to the offer of a career as opposed to the offer of just a job. A job is appealing. A career is exciting. Construction firms have already begun putting this point into practice.

“This year we’ve changed our thought process. We’re trying to get young people in the field to become estimators,” Wies says. “They’re already computer-literate. I don’t have to teach

them. Once they get experience in the field, they’ll develop their ideas on productivity and the products and fall right into estimating. For the kids out in the field, that’s the direction we’re heading. There will always be opportunities.”

A realistic job preview. There is no point to hiring field personnel only to have them become discouraged and quit. That is especially true if construction firms can better communicate upfront the nature of their work and the job requirements.

Breslin’s consulting firm is developing RJP, or Realistic Job Preview, programs.

“An RJP is something that you absolutely have to give to people so that they can self-screen for whether or not they want to be part of the industry,” he says.

“Part of our deal when we recruit is we tell them, ‘You’re going to make great money. You get to work outside,’” Breslin says. “What we don’t tell them is the realistic part that they may only work nine months a year and need to budget for three months off, and that the work may get dirty and it might be cold. People may be expected to work seven days a week, 10 hours a day, when a job is pumping. We do a terrible job at telling young people what they’re getting themselves into.”

A “good fit” corporate culture. Industry executives say that retaining quality people has a lot to do with the corporate culture.

“How you start somebody in your company basically dictates their career from start to finish,” Wies says. “If you start them with the intent that you’re hiring them to be your next generation of foremen, they’re going to perform to those standards. That’s how you’re managing them. But if you’re hiring them just to be cheap labor on that project, that’s all you’re going to get. I say look for future foremen when you bring people on, and you’ll get future foremen.”

Other Findings

MOTIVATIONS

Interests and Expectations

“Stimulating work.” It’s important for young people to have stimulating work, and they are not well prepared for boredom.

In his book, *Escaping the Endless Adolescence*, Joseph Allen, Ph.D., tells of a young man concerned about a particular job. During the job interview, the young man told Allen, “I get the sense that sometimes parts of the work can be a little boring, and I don’t want to be bored.” Allen writes: “He didn’t seem to understand that all jobs have some boring elements. How did one make it to age 23 without knowing that?”²²

“They have been told, ‘You’re the most precious thing that has ever happened to this earth. The world celebrated on the day you were born,’” says Anna Liotta, a generational expert at Resultance Inc., Seattle.²³

Work does not define them. While young people need jobs and want them, work in itself does not define their identity as work has with other generations. For baby boomers—whom young people are replacing in the workforce—what one does is associated directly with who they perceive themselves to be.

“It’s the central theme associated with [boomer] self-identity,” Breslin says. But that’s not the case with the current young generation. “[For young people] work is a means to an end,” Breslin says. “And it’s something that they do not anticipate being unpleasant.”

View of Construction Jobs

Looking to other industries before construction. Cipollaro-Beck says that the construction jobs generally are not as appealing to young people as are jobs in other industries. The reason has to do with the millennials’ work ethic. “They’ve been coddled. They haven’t had to work hard, because Mom and Dad have supported them,” she says. “My opinion is that the construction field is going to have a task ahead of them to make their careers look appealing [to young people].”

Not well prepared for difficult work environments. Breslin notes that working on a construction job site can be intense and stressful. This, he says, is not something young people are prepared for. “They do not thrive in a difficult environment,” Breslin says. “They do not have some of the tools for coping with failure or the resilience necessary to persist in the face of very challenging circumstances, which the construction industry is full of.”

MORE ON COMPENSATION

Young People Want to Feel Cared About, Then a Paycheck

But how important is compensation to young people? How do they rank it in comparison to other job criteria? Cipollaro-Beck says compensation is a Top 10 item, but it’s not number one. She says the number one thing for young people is wanting to feel cared about.

“Feeling ‘cared about’ basically means that millennials want to be respected, even though they’re young,” Cipollaro-Beck says. “They’re not looking for a chain of command at the workplace. They’re looking for collaboration. They want to be a part of a team. Compensation is not number one on their list, although they’ll quickly ask, ‘When will I make this much money?’ They’re bold enough to do that.”

“However, I believe that if an organization can make [young people] feel a part of a team, and feel cared about as an indi-

vidual, and not just part of a mass group,” Cipollaro-Beck adds, “it is going to be able to retain this generation.”

More on Construction Compensation

Wage levels seem competitive. Does the construction industry need to raise its compensation packages? “If you look at most apprentice rates, especially when they first start, they are low, especially for a guy who’s 29 years old,” Breslin says. “If people have opportunities, do they want to work for \$12 or \$13 an hour when they’re starting out? I think that’s too low. I think the rest of the package is great. A skilled guy in the construction industry can make \$50,000 to \$75,000 a year.”

“Since the early 1980s the construction industry paid better for an entry level position than an entry level into tech. I think that’s flip-flopped through the years,” Daley says. “I guess the answer is that it pays pretty well, and maybe we need to get the word out about how well it does pay. In our area [California], if you’re a hardworking foreman you can make \$80,000 a year easily, plus get a benefits package—another \$40,000.”

Construction offers decent upward mobility. “If you’re in a factory with 2,000 people, it’s hard to get noticed,” Heering says. “Here [at F.L. Crane & Sons] we have goals set, so that if you achieve them you get a pay raise. You get promoted—to a mechanic from a laborer. Then, more goals and more pay.”

“In manufacturing, you’re not getting that kind of a wage,” Heering adds. “With us, you’ve got a foreman for every four to five guys. In a manufacturing plant, you’ve got a foreman for a lot more people, so it’s not that great an opportunity.”

INDUSTRY ASSOCIATIONS

Next Steps for AWCI and Regional Associations

What can industry trade associations do to help attract young people to construction field positions? Here are some ideas.

Sponsor a YouTube channel. “These young people are going to get recruited online,” Breslin says. “I’d say they [trade associations] should sponsor YouTube videos about the industry. If you look up drywall on YouTube you might be unhappy to see what shows up. So, coordinate the industry’s message.”

“We could use it as a tool when we go to a school,” Heering says. “We’re trying to convince them. The manufacturer is over there trying to convince them to come into manufacturing. Another guy is saying, ‘Go to college and come work at our bank.’ That’s what you’re competing against when you go to job days. If we have a video that could show some really cool things, we’d look a lot more attractive.”

Provide a social media internship hub. Industry wall and ceiling executives say that associations can help individual firms promote their Facebook pages and serve as social media facilitators for internships and job postings.

Offer more assistance with career fairs. “I think career shows should be done, but I really think they need to be done at the association level,” Daley says. “I don’t think we can reasonably expect a subcontractor to be able to man those types of events, to have the resources. Our hiring needs aren’t big enough.”

Final Encouragement

CONCLUSION

Polish your company culture and take a long-term view

FMI Corporation, a research provider, says that the construction industry has shrunk 30 percent or more since its highs in 2007. This has been due to “loss of employees and less available work.”²⁴ Once the construction economy rebounds back to more normal levels, construction companies will once again be competing for talent. But what is going to take place? Will the construction industry be left with a serious shortage of workers? Or will workers who had been laid off come back?

“There will be a re-immigration into this state when work picks up again. It always has done that,” says Jeffrey A. Burley, CEO and president, B&B Interior Systems, Inc., Fort Lauderdale, Fla. “There will be a re-immigration of talent—including supervisory staff, operational people and possibly some estimators and project managers. Some of them have gotten into other fields. They could be working at a grocery store. They could be butchers or bakers. I don’t know. But once they see the money, and the value of their services back up to par, then they’ll jump back in.”

Still, many see now as a time ripe with opportunity. According to FMI, “As labor shortages return with the economy, those companies that can best recruit, manage and mobilize labor will have the edge.”²⁵ Here are some important final reminders:

Recruit at junior offices. Those that do don’t have a huge influx of employers in the blue collar sector approaching them. Smart companies are already at the junior college level. We’re just not,” Breslin says. “I think that is the place to be looking.

Consider recruits in their late 20s. Breslin says the average age of an apprentice in America is 28 years old. “A 28-year-old is usually serious about their career, is married or getting married soon,” Breslin says. “Now this flies in the face of the stereotypical, ‘We’ll get some young kid and bring him into the trades.’ But why not? They’ve decided they would rather be in the trades. They don’t want to work in a cubicle.”

Take a long-term view. “Just keep them working, and keep them engaged in the company. Keep them involved. Make sure they move up the ladder,” Wies says.

“For the wall and ceiling company of the future you have to get away from the idea that the company’s job is to put up drywall. They company’s job is going to be talent development,” Breslin says. “Talent development is the methodology by which the drywall gets up. If you’re not engaged in that process with this changing workforce, then your competition is going to kick your butt. It’s as simple as that. There’s not going to be enough highly skilled people. We’re in a retraining mode. So if you decide you don’t really want to do that, then you’re going to pay the price for it.”

Appendix

MORE ON THE MILLENNIALS

Millennials represent a large group. They are a large group—about 80 million strong ranging from 10 to 30 years of age. The youngest, currently age 10, will be job prospects seven to nine years from this paper’s publication date. Cipollaro-Beck says that the millennial generation has two subsets or cohorts:

The first cohort. The oldest was born in 1980. They are “the leading edge of millennials,” Cipollaro-Beck says, and are already in the workforce. As children, they grew up having experienced, on the negative side, the Columbine High School shooting, 9/11 and other notable events. On the positive side, they experienced a booming economy as 18- to 21-year-olds and had good job prospects.

The younger cohort. This group is 10 to 20 years in age. Cipollaro-Beck says they are being impacted by socio-economic concerns at a “deeper level” than older millennials. Like their older cohorts, young millennials have experienced negative events, such as the 2012 shootings at an Aurora, Colo., movie theater and at the Sandy Hook Elementary School in Connecticut.

An interesting development among millennials’ education is the growth in homeschooling. It’s driven by parents who desire a “unique” education for their children and feel that traditional schools are unacceptable “conformity models.” There are 50 times more homeschooled children now than there were 20 years ago.

- In 2006, there were between 100,000 and 200,000 homeschooled kids. It’s not a large group, but it’s growing by 10 percent to 15 percent each year.
- If we assume 10 percent annual growth in 100,000 homeschooled children, that would put the number in the aggregate at 260,000 by 2016 and at 673,000 by 2026.

COLLEGE CREDIT FOR APPRENTICE SCHOOLING

Craig Daley, president, Daley's Drywall & Taping, Campbell, Calif., says the carpenter's union in his area has enrolled its apprenticeship training program with some area colleges. This began in the early 2000s, Daley says, and it's significant because a worker can earn college credits while working on his apprenticeship. "You step up the level of how we're perceived," Daley says. "If a kid can say he's getting college credits for this, the perception of construction changes—it's not just a ditch-digging job."

Daley says his state has provided some funding for vocational training but has never associated it with college credits. The trend further reinforces the notion that community and junior colleges represent a fertile ground for recruiting construction workers.

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