



Sedey Helps Drive McCarthy's Efforts to Change the Perception of Construction Career Opportunities – Especially for Women

By Julie Devine

When Ray Sedey came to Dallas in 2015 to become McCarthy Building Companies' Southern Region President, overseeing the company's activities from Texas to Atlanta, he encountered the state's special version of the national labor shortage, exacerbated by a booming economy and the Texas energy industry's manpower needs. Since then, Sedey has become one of McCarthy's driving forces to recruit new talent by changing the perception of construction industry career paths, particularly for women.

"As the industry faces a skilled-workforce shortage, it's imperative to actively address the lack of female talent. We need it in order to provide the diversity of thought to best solve client needs, as well as to reflect the communities for which we build," he said.

McCarthy's efforts to introduce the industry to the future workforce include events in middle schools, high schools, and colleges. In addition, the company provides support for a week-long Texas A&M University camp that introduces high schoolers to the industry, as well as a partnership to create a program that allows students to earn an associate's degree in construction by the time they graduate high school. McCarthy also developed an internal program designed to create a company culture where women are supported in their careers.

Sedey joined McCarthy in 2000 as a project engineer after earning his bachelor's degree in Construction Engineering from Montana State University in Bozeman, Montana. He spent the next 15 years in a variety of roles in the company's Southwest Region before the promotion to his current position.

In his interview with *Texas Contractor*, Sedey shares the lessons he learned throughout his career and the solutions he sees for the state's workforce shortage.

Why did you choose a career in the construction industry?

My family has been in construction for multiple generations. My dad worked for Bechtel building power plants for 35 years, and he's continued to build even after retirement. Since I was a kid, this is what I wanted to do.

Who has been the biggest influence on your career?

My dad, Ray Sedey, Sr. Along with being the best builder I ever met, he taught me the work ethic and drive it takes to grow in life and this amazing industry. From his beginning in an entry-level role at Bechtel in 1970, he did whatever it took – including moving every year – to make the project better and those around him better.

What experiences prepared you for your current role?

Moving around as a kid helped me adapt to new areas and roles, something I've been doing since joining McCarthy. Prior to my current role, I led the McCarthy Southwest Region satellite offices in Nevada, New Mexico, and Colorado. Having the opportunity to lead smaller offices prior to leading the Southern Region was very helpful. Of course, I couldn't do any of it without a great support structure at home – my wife, Amy, and two boys, Justin and Ryan – along with all the great folks at McCarthy.

What's the best advice you ever received?

Trust and be trustworthy. As a leader, you need to trust your team from day one. At the same time, you need to work every day to gain their trust. This really creates an atmosphere where they're empowered.

What lessons have you learned in your professional life?

Invest in your people; they're the foundation of your company. I learned early on that our biggest asset is our 2,000-plus employee-owners and at least that many craft professionals. McCarthy has a great history of employee longevity because our team is properly trained and provided the opportunity to increase in responsibility and rise through the ranks. Investing in employees makes sense for us and for our clients. What we do has lasting effects for a variety of stakeholders, and we're committed to doing it right the first time. We're successful at that because we invest in the people making important decisions and those in the field constructing the structures.

How do you think the industry can best address today's workforce challenges?

We can't wait for someone else to fix this; we need to help create and drive the solution. One great way to start is educating students and their parents about the industry and how rewarding it is, regardless of whether they enter through the trades or post-college. Our best builders are not exclusive to either path and both are valued.

Why is McCarthy increasing outreach to women?

Females comprise 50.8 percent of the U.S. population and 47 percent of the country's workforce. However, that rate plummets to nine percent in the construction industry (including administration, human resources, and marketing) and just under three percent in production roles, according to the National Association of Women in Construction. Early discussions with families about construction career opportunities need to happen in order to dispel the myth that women cannot be successful in our industry. There are a wide variety of career paths in engineering, estimating, and technology, to name a few, and we want to ensure that all students know opportunities are there for them, regardless of gender.

What new strategies are you using to recruit and train?

At McCarthy, we're developing an entire process that includes recruiting and educating at high schools, trade schools, community colleges, and universities, while simultaneously taking on a systematic training process at job sites. This has been a huge focus for us over the last couple of years. Developing the next generation of skilled craft professionals and superintendents is critical to our industry and our business. We want to ensure a high skill level as we continue to grow our self-perform work in both heavy civil and commercial. We put our plan into action by increasing our internal recruiting and training staff and encouraging all our employees to be champions for the industry. It's certainly not something that will happen overnight, but this process could transform the construction industry.



Ray Sedey