

## OGCA President's Report – September 29, 2020

### “What does the Construction Sector require for longevity?”

The question posed in the heading may have many of you scratching your heads in bewilderment, or perhaps you have had an epiphany and know the age-old answer to the query. Either way it does not lessen the fact that our entire construction industry needs to work towards a concerted method of not only attracting talent to construction, but more importantly keeping talent in construction as a career instead of a job.

What's the difference between a job and a career you ask?

The dictionary definition of a job is “a paid position of regular employment.” In contrast, a career is defined as “a pursuit of consecutive progressive achievement especially in professional or business life.”

With a job, people do it because they need to do so to survive. A job is only viewed as a means to an end and to generate money to “get by.” Everyone starts at some point in their young life with a job. And then you may bounce around from one job to another, getting experience and solidifying what you like and avoiding what you don't. But no one ever says that the job they start with is the one that they want to do forever. People may settle on just a job, but they never start out wanting that outcome. They always want to strive for more.

As you slowly gain experience and further refine your talents, learning incrementally from each job experience, then you start turning your thoughts towards what your next achievement will be. When you then move towards a career, you are now doing so because it not only generates an income, but because you have a significant desire to excel or to make a difference in your chosen vocation. You develop passion and finally pride in what you do.

Herein lies the fundamental difference between the two definitions. Pride and passion are the keys to attracting and retaining not only youth to construction, but others displaced by the pandemic that are currently re-evaluating their lives and need a change in direction.

Construction can be that solution for both camps because of what it offers. Endless possibilities, creativity and a sense of complete fulfillment in knowing that you are part of a team that built something that will last.

I was exposed to this level of pride and passion at an early age through my father.

My father immigrated to Canada from Italy where he had studied, trained and worked as a traditional stone mason. In Europe, having a trade was seen as a professional designation. It was look upon with pride and trades people were sought after and treated with respect. Upon coming to Canada, he was able to secure work within days of his arrival as a bricklayer on a construction site. My father was fortunate to find employers in Canada who saw what he offered as an asset.

I recall driving around with my dad and he would point to one building after another, and recite the number of bricks and blocks used to construct this one or that one. He would be able to recount a special story that had happened on each site and always with a gleam in his eye. My father loved what he did, and the pride he had for his vocation was not only palpable, it was contagious.

Unfortunately, somewhere along the line between the days of my father's beaming pride to now, a generational shift occurred wherein it was frowned upon to be associated with construction. It was a complete paradigm shift that transformed one of the most foundational pillars of our

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economy into a place where those who could not succeed at “a real job” ended up. It was viewed as failing.

But how did this come to be? Clearly, we still needed construction to continue. The economy still needed things to be built. What changed?

I can recall conversations with people that openly frowned upon construction as a disgusting and dirty job. It was looked upon as nothing more than menial labour and those that performed said labour were no better than “donkeys.” This was the start of the negative construction stereotype and the gradual reluctance of people to have their children enter the field. Construction was usurped from a viable career option to just another job in one generation.

Regardless of the stereotypes that were placed on our noble vocation, construction was able to survive and now with the pandemic, many have looked to the construction industry with renewed respect.

It is one of the very few industries that has not only been able to weather COVID, but has fared better and is still in demand moving forward. Construction, in the eyes of society, is now seen as an “essential service” and the key to restarting the economy. This pandemic may be what construction needed to demonstrate its worth. It may have been the reset construction needed to reinvigorate our industry.

So, what should we be doing now to change perceptions of construction?

The entire construction industry needs to unite and communicate that construction is a destination, a career that can be relied upon for future generations.

So, let's start to boast a little more. Let's pat ourselves on the back and communicate openly about the benefits that construction offers. Let's parlay this current positive uptick in the construction image to formulate a new stereotype for those looking at construction as the destination of choice and the place to be: where the best and the brightest flock to and where you create legacy buildings for future generations. Let's attract and keep the talent within the construction sector.

Let's point to the projects that we have all worked on together and note how many metric tonnes of concrete we poured on this one or the energy efficiency of the lighting or HVAC system we installed on that one. Let's talk about construction in the same way my father did; with a gleam in our eyes, and welcome those that want to make it their career.

Should any of our members want to share similar stories about why construction is the place to be, or if you require assistance from the OGCA, please contact me directly at [giovanni@ogca.ca](mailto:giovanni@ogca.ca) or via phone at 905.671.3969.