

“What does the Construction Sector require for longevity?”

I have a different perspective. I was born in Weston, Ontario in 1961, into a family that spans more than 5 generations in Canada. Growing up in the Etobicoke area as the youngest of 5 boys, I was always told that getting that University Degree was the most important thing to focus on.

I suppose I was the black sheep as I never thought this way. I always thought that education was important, but the focus should be doing what you are passionate about. It took a few years to figure out that I was passionate about photography and communication in general, and the psychology of what makes people tick. Construction was not even in my field of view at that time. It wasn't until much later, as I finally got out on my own and was in the “JOB” mode, that I discovered the construction industry as something steady that could provide a good income that would allow me to focus on what I really wanted to do. It would pay the bills and allow me to do the things I wanted to do. So, with a college diploma in photography and audiovisual communications, I started a job as a union labourer with local 506. After 6 months of pushing a broom, digging holes and cleaning up after others, my first mentor came along. He was a superintendent who saw some potential in me. I had been watching all the trades doing their work for the past 6 months, thinking to myself that I could be doing that work too.

I was partial to electrical work as I saw that as more of a thinking trade than some others. What did I know?

I started helping the Super with his paperwork and expediting trades, submittals and material purchases. After a year of this work, he suggested to me that I pursue a career in construction, starting off as a project coordinator. This is where the “JOB” suddenly became a potential “CAREER.” I started thinking about the possibilities. I decided to follow this path to see where it might lead. I applied for and was hired as a project coordinator with a Toronto-based General Contracting firm, and left local 506 to start a career in construction management. After working for a year as a site coordinator, it became apparent to me that the construction industry was a place I could potentially succeed in. I enrolled in night school: Ryerson's architectural program, as architecture was a form of visual art that I appreciated and could relate to. The six years that followed saw a steady career path develop and a successful completion at Ryerson and Architectural Technologist designation. The construction Industry was becoming an exciting place to be with lots to see and learn and many diverse types of projects.

One of the things I love about construction is the fact that most projects have a 1 to 3-year duration in which you are part of a team and a project that eventually ends. You then move on to something new, with a new group of people and a new challenge. It's fantastic in that you are part of many different projects and many different teams, getting to know something new with each project completed.

While in the first year or two I saw construction as a job, I never saw it as something for dummies without an education, or as a last resort job when you couldn't find anything else. As a labourer watching all the skilled trades on construction sites, I grew to appreciate the hard work and skill in everything from Drywall-taping and mudding to Masonry and Painting to Mechanical and Electrical trade work.

I seemed to have an eye for detail, the photographer in me, and really appreciated the art in what the trades were doing. What others might see as a simple trade task, I saw as a finely-tuned skill. Laying up block or brick might seem simple but to do it right and with great productivity takes skill.

With a growing experience in construction and getting educated in my chosen field, my eye developed further. One of my professors at Ryerson said on day 1: "Once you complete this course, you'll never be able to look a building the same way again." This was so true and made it clearer to me, the skill that trades had in completing quality work.

While at Ryerson studying architecture, I came across the story of the Hoover Dam. It was constructed between **1931 and 1936** during the Great Depression and was dedicated on September 30, 1935, by President Franklin D. Roosevelt.

It struck me that this massive construction project literally saved lives during the depression, as construction allowed family providers to gain employment and literally feed their families.

The story of the Hoover Dam and construction projects in Canada helped me appreciate the construction industry as a stabilizing factor in our economy and a major contributor to our GDP.

When times are good there is much private investment driving construction. When the economy tanks is typically when government invests in infrastructure projects and capital improvements, sustaining all of us in the business of construction and related manufacturing and services.

The construction sector has weathered many storms and adapted to changing technologies, including those technologies being driven by environmental concerns. From Heritage restoration projects to design build "off the grid" LEED, construction continues to offer a wide range of diverse opportunities for all types of career paths.

As the ones who physically execute the work, trade workers are the all-important backbone of our industry, and if there is only one thing to name that speaks to construction success and longevity, it is the quality and availability of good trades people.

Pick a trade, learn how to do it well. It will always serve you well. If you have a business aptitude and interest you can develop that trade ability and experience into your own business and continue to reap the benefits of one of the world's best industries to be part of!

Marc Ferguson

Triniti Construction Managers

