

QoD – Internal and external training; how do we pay for it?

As the economy improves and we slowly get back to being busy and beyond in our design offices and manufacturing facilities, we will inevitably need to hire more staff. The same is true for those in the role of specifying our components as well as those in the city or county code enforcement. In almost every instance, these new people need to be trained and educated on industry standards, local code variations and the like. Who is going to do this training and how on earth are we going to pay for it?

Internal training, be it for designers or plant personnel may well be handled completely in-house with the use of some easily accessible documentation and a little time shadowing the company lead in each department. The Structural Building Components Association (SBCA) makes Truss Technician Training pretty simple with online training modules available 24/7. Learning specific company nuances is a bit longer in the making as they often get learned as the situation arises. In the plant, the Quality Control Manual is a great place to start, as well as some hands on time with the saw and table leads. Obviously, the other option is to go out and steal someone from the competition. That is normally expensive, and what holds them back the next time more money is thrown their way? The truth is, both of these options are somewhat short-sighted.

As was so eloquently stated recently during a SBCA webinar featuring Roger Axel, CBO from Minnesota and Rick Parrino, General Manager of Plum Building Systems in Iowa, Industry training and education really has to be a long-term, relationship building exercise. Whether you are trying to build a future labor pool or educate your local specifiers and code enforcement staff, the process must begin with you! Many of the local architects and engineers also cut staff during the last economic downturn. How many of the new interns have ever even heard of ANSI/TPI 1 or the BCSI? What about the local high schools, technical colleges and universities? It is up to us to offer to get out to their classrooms, offices or industry association meetings and introduce these staples of our industry to them. No one else is going to do this for you. Perhaps, if you're lucky, you will have the assistance of another kind-hearted sole in your local SBCA Chapter, but if not, you'll just have to do it on your own. Believe me; I have done plenty of these trainings over the years. I can honestly say that I have always gotten more out of these events than I ever put into them. The appreciation shown by the recipients and the relationships you will start developing are simply priceless. In offering to help train the students, specifiers and code officials you come to be viewed as a valuable resource to them. Who else knows more about the products you design and manufacture everyday? Scared to do it because someone may ask a question you can't answer? I hope that doesn't also prevent you from picking-up the phone when it rings in your office. What better way to reinforce for them the resource you really are when you get back to the group in the next day-or-so with an accurate answer. That's also a great way to help them lock in your name and face in their resource library. The pay-off comes when they start sending clients your way because your company 'knows how to do it the way they want it done'.

For those of you that have adversarial relationships with your code officials and/or specifiers, it may be time to look in the mirror. Is your way really the only way or can there be some common ground reached with a little dialogue? In the long run it is better to lose a single battle and win the proverbial war. It will always be more beneficial to have a specifier reference ANSI/TPI 1, Chapter 2, than for you to spend days explaining Design Responsibilities to everyone involved in the project. Having the Engineer of Record and the Building Inspector pre-trained on the concepts and contents of the BCSI gives you extra eyes on the job to assure that your products are being properly erected, restrained and braced; items critical to long-term building performance and happy customers.

It doesn't say so in either BCSI or TPI 1, but the responsibility to pay it forward when it comes to industry training lies with each and every one of us. If we can't take the time to mentor those that work with us and that will follow us, we have no right to complain when things don't go our way. It could be that the designer, specifier or code official simply didn't know what you expected them to know because you never took the time to explain it to them. If you want help with that training, give me a call. I, or one of my associates would be delighted to assist.