

KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER FOR BETTER SAFETY CULTURE

By Collin Pullar, President, Saskatchewan Construction Safety Association

As with all industries, there is a constant ebb and flow of workers entering and exiting the construction sector. Some are young and new to the workforce; only recently making the decision to pursue their careers in construction. Others are seasoned veterans who have experienced long careers and are looking to scale back their time and effort. They will begin to hand their work over to a new generation and enjoy the fruits of their years of labour. Both groups, while at distinctly different points in their work lives, have some common opportunities, particularly with respect to ensuring the skills they are developing and the skills they have developed can bring value to their businesses for a long time.

Education – formal or informal – is one of the best opportunities that both groups can share. This is particularly true with respect to the kinds of safe work practices that can prevent the delays and injuries that can stem from a simple mistake. There is a saying that the only thing better than your own knowledge and experience is benefiting from the knowledge and experience of someone who's been through it before. We all have something to learn, regardless of where we are in our careers, but younger workers desperately need the knowledge and experiences of their "seasoned" colleagues to help bring gravity to what they are learning today.

Workers that are transitioning to retirement have the unenviable, but direct knowledge of, experiencing a serious workplace accident and near misses. This cohort has a great asset available to a new workforce where they can – through their stories, care, and emphasis – prevent the damaging things that they may have had to endure themselves. At the same time, younger workers have the benefit of getting the latest knowledge and current messaging about workplace hazards,

their personal rights, and their own responsibilities, to ensure they, and those around them, are not put in jeopardy. This is an education in business culture and expectations that younger employees need to bring into a workplace – take the advice, be assertive about the right way to do things. Combined with the energy of their youth, employers have a powerful force that can revolutionize a business; maybe even teach an old dog like me a new trick or two!

True story...my eldest son recently started a new job. On his first day, he came home and was excited to tell me of his orientation, and in particular, that his senior managers told him that they wanted everybody to go home safely, and that it was important that they pay attention and follow their practices. He was also energized by the fact that he was encouraged to stop any of his seasoned colleagues at any time and ask if he could observe their work processes, jot down any safety suggestions or ways work could be completed more efficiently. While he is definitely the junior kid on the team, his senior team members absolutely needed him and his energy to help them be better too.

For those leaders in our sector, this is where we need to find and encourage ways to have both our young/inexperienced workers and the more seasoned workers who are looking to leave a legacy as they consider retirement, gain as much from each other as possible. This may mean helping our young folks learn from our mistakes and losses that occurred as a result of past safety cultures, to asking our young people help us build a strong safety culture moving forward. This transfer of knowledge between generations of workers can create some invaluable opportunities for our industry to remain competitive, productive, and prosperous. 🏢

Collin Pullar is the president of the Saskatchewan Construction Safety Association (SCSA) – An industry-driven and funded association serving more than 9,000 member commercial, industrial, and residential construction companies in Saskatchewan. Its mission is to provide high-quality, nationally-recognized safety training and advice to construction employers and workers leading to reduced human and financial losses associated with injuries.

