

WINTER 2023

Sheet Metal Journal

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British Columbia

CONSTRUCTION OUTLOOK 2023

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Outlook Survey Results

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World - Part II

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Official Journal of
Record for SMACNA-BC



PROMOTING GROWTH AND STABILITY IN OUR INDUSTRY

Formed in 1969, the British Columbia Sheet Metal Association (SMACNA-BC) was the first international chapter of the Sheet Metal & Air-conditioning Contractors National Association (SMACNA). Founded in 1934, SMACNA traces its history to the National Association of Sheet Metal Contractors established in 1910, and has 2,300 members worldwide.

SMACNA-BC is a member-driven association representing unionized sheet metal contractors in the Mainland of BC, and suppliers to our industry. It promotes the growth and stability of the members and industry.

OUR MANDATE

- To improve the financial stability and business conditions of the sheet metal industry, and to develop and promote methods to improve managerial proficiency
- To improve quality, efficiency and productivity of this industry, and to implement high standards of work
- To establish and maintain high ethical standards of conduct between members of the Association, and between members and owners, architects, engineers, other contractors, and the public
- To promote harmony in labour relations
- To study and help in the development and enforcement of governmental codes and regulations, and such legislation as may be necessary for the best interest of the public and the sheet metal industry
- To exchange technical, professional, and educational information with other contractor associations in the sheet metal industry and its allied trades in Canada and other countries
- To affiliate as a Chapter with the Sheet Metal & Air-conditioning Contractors National Association, Inc.

BC Sheet Metal Association (SMACNA-BC) • Executive Director: Jeremy Hallman

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TIME TO GET CREATIVE

The BC construction industry is a fighter. Never prone to lay down their gloves in the face of adversity, the men and women who work in this sector—which is no more immune to interest rate spikes and threats of recession than anywhere else in Canada—keep charging forward. They are accustomed to the boom and bust cycles that have driven their careers for decades. They are firm and tough in their resource industry roots. They are focused. They are driven. But are they prepared for the future?

Because the future we face will require more than grit (although grit is also essential). It will require connection, new thinking, and creativity. Most importantly, we can't ignore—or worse, brush off—all of that youthful, creative energy the next generation is bringing to the table. We might feel pride in our heads-down-get'er-done work ethic, and so we should, but that doesn't mean our vision of a strong work ethic can't expand to include new skills and attributes. Indeed, constant reassurance, task-based feedback, technology that seems to be ev-e-r-y where is a lot for the veterans in any field, but if we get caught up in the fear and irritation of change, we will lose out on a tremendous opportunity.

Let's shift our view a bit. A generation that demands work-life balance is going to save us a lot of dough on sick time. Lots of up-front feedback may save time and cost on rework later. And we all know that technology does, in fact, assist with productivity. Keeping our minds flexible might just help solve the labour issue, and it will at least save employers the heartburn of worrying about “the way things used to be”.

Several landmark projects in the Lower Mainland are wrapping up this year, and at least two more are on the horizon, but is it enough? Housing starts are on the decline, and although that specific market isn't thre bread and butter of most SMACNA-BC contractor members, it is an important indicator of the general market and the province's—and Canada's—overall health. While continually proving they are a resilient bunch, SMACNA-BC contractors will have to keep up the great work on connecting, sharing ideas and labour, and supporting one another whenever necessary. They don't call it a brother/sisterhood for nothing.

We kick off this issue with an update from SMACNA-BC Executive Director Jeremy Hallman, who outlines the past quarter's activities and achievements. There is no doubt he is settling nicely into his position, and we have heard great feedback from many of you on his activities so far.

This year's construction outlook article is focused on the issues we predicted—labour, supply chain, and policy around improving both. We have been talking about the labour and skill shortage for a decade, and although the government and various associations are throwing everything they have at solving this issue, still, the void exists. Since the likelihood is low that a single, golden solution will spawn 80,000 skilled



By / Jessica Kirby, Editor, *Sheet Metal Journal*

construction workers in from nowhere, recruitment and retention must be a collective effort. Its success must hinge on more creative methods, like labour sharing, creating healthy cultures the workforce wants to stay a part of, and each of us becoming an ambassador to the trades, ekeing in conversations here and there about how rewarding it can be. One statistic that stood out for in me in Robin's article on page 6 was that the number of female tradespersons is dropping. How can that be? We all need to work double time on reversing that trend or risk losing that potential.

The *Sheet Metal Journal* Construction Outlook Survey (page 9) is always one of my favourite things to administer and interperet. Truth be told, I am not a statistician, but I do enjoy crunching these numbers and reading the comments respondents leave behind. While the totals we report are verbatim from the survey software, some of the comments are softened—you really are a passionate bunch! Be sure to take a peek and let me know your thoughts. I have shared with SMACNA-BC the items contractors identified as areas where they need support. If you have more suggestions, be sure to reach out to SMACNA-BC or drop me a line, as I could potentially source an article on that topic.

And for our third feature, Ron Coleman gives a light primer on social media, the most popular platforms, and how you can use them to maximize your reach. To be fair, it can be difficult to find the time to develop a social media or digital marketing strategy, and learning how to make a Snap story or a TikTok reel seems a lot more like goofing off than working. However, this is the stuff the future is made of, especially when it comes to creative recruitment. And remember, it doesn't have to be you sharing, posting, and liking—this is a good job for interns and up-and-comers, especially because it can connect the generations in reciprocal mentorship. Start thinking about it after you read the story on page 11.

Be sure to set time aside for the SMACNA-BC conference, May 4–7 in beautiful Victoria, BC. Most of us have enjoyed the way events are opening up and welcoming guests back to some face-to-face interaction, so let's keep the momentum going and plan for a fun and exciting weekend in the province's capital.

In the meantime, keep in touch and don't be afraid to send me your article ideas, feedback, and gregarious compliments. ■

2023 EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES AT SMACNA-BC

The fall and winter seasons at SMACNA-BC were quite busy. I have been learning my way around the office and placing my personal stamp on things where I can. We have been actively booking speakers for dinners and training seminars for 2023 and are aiming to populate our SMACNA-BC Events Calendar beyond a few months to allow everyone additional time to plan. business.smacna-bc.org/events

I attended the MCA Christmas party at Loft and the VRCA luncheon at the Vancouver Convention Centre. Both were great events and clearly everyone was glad to be back out in person, based on the numbers at both. I also attended a Council of Chapter Representatives meeting in Phoenix, Arizona, in early December. Believe it or not, I managed to bring the cold weather and rain with me. The information offered over the two days was very informative, but the time spent with council members was definitely one of the highlights for me.

Going back to November, we hosted our annual SMACNA-BC Christmas Party at the Pan Pacific Hotel in Vancouver, which appeared to be a hit again this year. We sold out at 260 people and managed to squeeze another ten in from the waiting list, for a total of 270. Thanks again to Michelle for all her hard work on this. As I said the night of the party, if it was left up to me, we might have been barbequing in the parking lot. I would also like to thank everyone who attended again for supporting Helping Families in Need Society. Together, we raised money and donated gifts that will be distributed to families in need around the Lower Mainland: helpingfamiliesinneed.org

The consensus from contractors for 2023 (based on work-on-hand) is that everyone expects to be busy. Unfortunately, there is also an underlying concern regarding inflation and humanpower. Hopefully, we can navigate our way out of COVID and other sickness through this winter season and continue a safe, happy, and prosperous New Year!

Reminders

I wanted to send out a reminder to apply for the SMACNA College of Fellows 2023 scholarship program for the 2023–2024 academic year. The scholarship application and details on eligibility requirements along with instructions for submitting the application are available on the SMACNA website https://smacna.org/stay-informed/news-and-publications/member-update/college-of-fellows-still-accepting-scholarship-applications?_zs=JGe4W1&_zl=mTB18

The Primary Goal of the COF Scholarship fund is to provide scholarships to SMACNA member contractors, employees of SMACNA member contractors, SMACNA chapter executives, National SMACNA employees, SMACNA Associate Members, and members of the families of all these groups who are participating in undergraduate studies in accredited institutions of higher education.



Jeremy Hallman,
Executive Director, SMACNA-BC

SMACNA-BC and Point One Media greatly appreciate your involvement and time answering the *Sheet Metal Journal* Construction Outlook survey for 2023 and providing this valuable informational tool for your association and the sheet metal industry in BC. See the results on page 9.

Mark your Calendars (or keep an eye on ours)

March 9, 2023

Supervisory Training Program at the Surrey Civic Hotel – Maxim Consulting

SMACNA-BC Project Management Course: Driving Predictable Cost Projections. Presented by Stephane McShane of Maxim Consulting. Registration to follow.

April 20, 2023

SMACNA Dinner meeting at the Surrey Civic Hotel – Nick Paczkowski

May 4-7, 2023

SMACNA-BC 54th Annual General Meeting & Convention at the Delta Hotel by Marriott Victoria Ocean Pointe Resort in Victoria, BC. Registration to follow. ■



New SMACNA-BC member Jose Tunon from Airflow Mechanical Ltd. (l) with SMACNA-BC President, Phil McDonald at the January, 2023, dinner meeting.



CANADA

Construction Outlook 2023

2023 promises large infrastructure projects and private investment, but construction industry leaders call for changes to immigration policy to fill 81,000 jobs

By Robin Brunet

In some ways, 2023 for the Canadian construction sector is shaping up to be a repeat of 2022 in that it is experiencing an embarrassment of riches. The riches are a wide array of major projects that, for the main, commenced last year. The embarrassment—or challenge—is the ongoing question of whether there will be enough humanpower to handle all the work.

Some circumstances make the construction landscape different from 2022. For example, in some cases skyrocketing materials prices are starting to stabilize, and the hope is they will begin to move downward as the year progresses. Also, rampant inflation is, unlike last year, beginning to take its toll in the form of a cooling off of the once white-hot residential market.

Immigration Reform Needed

But above everything else, labour is the dominant concern of the industry's advocacy leaders. Driving them is Ottawa's plan to repair, maintain, and retrofit infrastructure while also building for future

climate resilience at a time when the construction industry is struggling to fill over 81,000 jobs nationwide.

While last year's announcement from the federal government that Canada would welcome up to 500,000 new immigrants annually by 2025 is helpful, it's only a start, as far as the Canadian Construction Association (CCA) is concerned. It is calling for Ottawa to modernize its immigration policy and point system to better recognize labourers and those with relevant skills; work with the provinces to ensure skills matching is properly funded and supported; and update the Temporary Foreign Worker program.

CCA president Mary Van Buren points out that older workers reaching retirement will contribute to the problem "if steps aren't taken to rebuild Canada's workforce now." She adds, "The current federal immigration point system does not favour the trades: many newcomers cannot even find work in their field

of expertise. We need to put their skills and experience to work and expedite the recognition of their training and credentials.”

Major Projects in Canada

Ian Cunningham, president, Council of Ontario Construction Associations (COCA), says of home-grown recruits, “It will be extremely difficult to train them quickly enough to meet capacity.” Therefore, Cunningham thinks the rollout of Ottawa’s infrastructure upgrades—as well as many other projects—may happen more slowly than desired.

Still, Ontario is a good example of immense projects underway that are proceeding smoothly, and Cunningham cites the Ontario Line and the Gordie Howe International Bridge as two of dozens of examples of major projects that dominated 2022 and will continue in 2023. The former is a 15.6-kilometre subway line that will make it faster and easier to travel within Toronto and beyond. The latter, which has been under construction since 2019, will connect Windsor to Detroit. The towers of the bridge were recently completed, and once the entire \$5.7 billion structure is completed in 2024, it will be the longest cable-stayed bridge in North America at 0.53 miles. “The point is, every section of our province is busy with big projects,” Cunningham says.

The same holds true for other provinces. Sean Strickland, executive director, Canada’s Building Trades Union (CBTU), says, “We have two major electric car battery plants going into Ontario and one in Quebec. In Saskatchewan, there is a major potash project ramping up. In Alberta are a host of upcoming carbon sequestering projects, and in BC workers are occupied with lots of road building and a massive extension to the SkyTrain line.”

Construction in Western Canada

In fact, SkyTrain is undergoing two massive extensions, one being a 5.7 kilometer extension of the Millennium Line (with six underground stations) scheduled to open in 2026. The Surrey Langley SkyTrain project will extend the Expo Line 16 kilometers to Langley City.

The Alberta Strickland mentions stems from Emissions Reduction Alberta committing \$40 million from the province’s Technology Innovation and Emissions Reduction fund to 11 projects worth \$194 million. If successful, these projects could lead to over \$20 billion in capital expenditures and create thousands of jobs.

As for Saskatchewan and potash, in November, workers at the Jansen potash mine completed the excavation and lining of the 1,000 meter deep shafts, the largest of their kind in the province. Owner BHP is seeking to accelerate the \$5.7 billion project with the aim to start potash extraction in 2026.

Rebuilding Canada’s Workforce

Strickland is united with Van Buren and Cunningham in calling

It will be extremely difficult to train home-grown recruits to the construction industry quickly enough to meet capacity.

—Ian Cunningham, president, COCA

for a rebuilding of Canada’s workforce. “We currently bring in 100,000 new apprentices yearly, but we need to do better. We also need to support apprentices by putting minimum requirements for them into work contracts.”

But Strickland is cautiously optimistic of the strides made so far. “In working on express entry immigration with Ottawa, we made headway with heavy equipment operators in 2022,” he says. “Also, BC has a best in class program that would help nurture a new generation of Canadian construction workers. It could and should be replicated in other provinces.”

Strickland is referring to BC Infrastructure Benefits (BCIB), a Crown corporation accountable for implementing the Community Benefits Agreement (CBA) on select public infrastructure projects. BCIB’s purpose includes mobilizing and growing a safe, diverse, and skilled workforce. It is the employer for all employees on CBA projects and ensures priority hiring is given to equally qualified local residents, Indigenous people, and other underrepresented groups (it is also responsible for training, capacity building, and worker support).

Despite all the concerns, construction association leaders are fairly optimistic that their industry can meet the needs of both government and private developers. “There have always been and always will be challenges in our industry,” Cunningham says. “But at the end of the day, we’re a can-do bunch of people. I’m always amazed at what can be done and what gets done.”

Spotlight on British Columbia

Ask anyone in B.C.’s construction sector how they’re doing in 2023, and the answer will likely be that they’re swamped with work—which bodes well for an industry that represents 9.7 percent of the province’s GDP and employs over 236,000 people.

But contractors are facing considerable challenges, according to the Fall 2022 BC Construction Association (BCCA) Industry Stat Pack.

The report shows that investment in the province’s industrial, commercial, and institutional construction sectors is down 10.9 percent since February 2020, while the non-residential building price index spiked 19.6 percent.

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Rising prices have caused the construction industry to grow 10 percent in dollar value despite the decrease in demand. It has also experienced a massive 80 percent increase in the value of current projects compared to five years ago. But BCCA president Chris Atchison points out that this isn't good news when paired with competition for talent causing wages to soar 26 percent since 2017.

"Yes, people are busy, but these figures are cause for concern," he says.

Even more troubling to Atchison is the fact that unlike in other provinces, Victoria has failed to deliver on prompt payment legislation. "Without it, B.C.'s contractors will take on increased cost of debt, and some will risk bankruptcy as they wait 90-120 days to be paid," he says.

Unsurprisingly, B.C.'s labour situation is a story unto itself. Despite an increase in the number of construction companies (now 26,262), the average company size has decreased 7 percent over the last three years. Plus, the number of tradespeople overall has dropped 5 percent over three years (equally troubling, women comprise 5.7 percent of tradespeople, but that number has been decreasing 8 percent year-over-year since 2017).

Acutely aware of the B.C. industry's strengths and weaknesses, organizations such as the Vancouver Regional Construction Association (which is dedicated to connecting industry players and creating opportunities) continues to offer financial support to those currently enrolled in a construction-related field of study at a regional post-secondary institution, via the VRCA Bursary Program.

The VRCA also generates considerable media attention for the construction industry by hosting events and panel discussions, and last year its online panel discussion, "Fixed-Price Contracts in a Price-Volatile Market," broke VRCA attendance records (key suggestions from the session included the warning to contractors and subcontractors that if there isn't an escalation clause or if supplementary conditions are excessive, they may need to turn down the work).

Despite the challenges facing B.C.'s construction industry, a massive array of projects is scheduled for procurement start this year, including a host of hospitals (including those in Nanaimo, Kamloops, and Metro Vancouver). Infrastructure work underway includes two major extensions to the SkyTrain lines and the LNG Canada Terminal in Kitimat, which at \$40 billion is the largest single private sector investment in Canadian history. The total estimated value of major construction projects currently underway in B.C. is \$135.4 billion.

"Our industry is massive, essential, and struggling," Atchison concludes. "So while 2023 is super busy, we will continue to advocate for better conditions for our members." ■



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2023

Sheet Metal Journal

Construction Outlook Survey

The results are in: labour tops the challenges and opportunities lists, contractors performed better than anticipated in 2022.

The *Sheet Metal Journal* Construction Outlook Survey is a valuable tool for garnering feedback on the industry's concerns and opportunities moving into the coming year. Our team reviews each completed survey and comment and provides relevant details here, in this yearly analysis of members' thoughts, and to SMACNA-BC to help the office shape its service offering for the year.

Demographics

First, let's explore who answered the survey. Contractors made up 58% of respondents to this year's survey. Another 22% were suppliers, 15% were manufacturers, and 10% simply identified as Local 280 members. Of those, 54% consider HVAC their company's specialty. Companies representing architectural, industrial, and specialty/custom specialties represented 10, 12, and 15% of respondents, respectively, while 13% represented TAB contractors and another 15% selected "other", such as pollution control and specialty ventilations. Note, some contractors identified more than one specialty, hence the total exceeding 100%.

Construction's status as essential service work carried most contractors through 2021, and in 2022, most businesses continued to thrive, despite labour challenges. Asked how they expected their businesses to perform last year over 2021, 54% responded "above average", while the rest replied "same as 2021" (27%), "a little down" (13%), and "better than expected" (6%). None of the respondents anticipated their "worst year ever", which is encouraging.

Real and Anticipated Performance 2022-23

Actual performance in 2022 exceeded those expectations. While the data may or may not represent the predictions and actual performance of the same group of contractors surveyed last year, Figure 1 does represent an overall view of how contractors expected to perform in 2022 and how they actually performed. Interesting to note is that 54% of contractors performed above average while none expected this. While 25% of contractors expected to be "a little down" for 2022, only 13% reported this was the case for their businesses. Predictions for 2023 are cautious but similar to actual performance in 2022, with 14% fewer contractors expecting to come out above average and 14% more expecting business to drop off slightly over this year.

	What contractors expected for 2022	Actual performance in 2022	Expected for 2023
Better than ever / expected	30%	7%	7%
A little above average	0%	54%	40%
Same as 2021	25%	27%	27%
A little down	25%	13%	27%
Bracing for the worst	0%	0%	0%

Figure 1: Predicted and actual performance in 2022, predicted performance for 2023.

Opportunities, Challenges, and Investments

This year, retention and recruitment is by far the topic SMACNA contractors, suppliers, and manufacturers are most concerned with. Seventy-five percent of survey respondents identified recruitment as their biggest challenge for 2023, with a handful selecting other choices, such as economic decline (10%), material delays (6%), pricing (5%), and having too much work (4%).

Labour is, of course, an ongoing concern in all industries, but it is especially important in a trade that fabricates its materials and components and requires a high-skilled and trained workforce to get the job done to SMACNA’s high standards. But contractors are tackling the challenge with investment and action plans to bulk up the labour supply.

Respondents plan to invest in recruitment and retention (73%), technology (47%), training (33%), and expanding (33%), while none of the respondents plan to leave the industry this year.

Looking ahead to industry areas that present opportunities, most contractors identified those related to recruitment. “We must attract new tradespeople at the high school level, showing that the trades can be a profitable career,” said one respondent. “Comparing to previous decades, entry level out of high school is extremely low.”

Others suggested bringing in trained foreign workers, encouraging new, young people to get properly trained in the industry, and optimizing current teams so companies can work most effectively with the personnel already in place.

Labour shortage isn’t the only concern relating to recruitment. Several respondents identified low quality of workmanship on projects due to lack of skilled labour and one saw an opportunity in using BIM to reduce wastage and rework caused by inexperienced workers running projects.

Several see opportunities in new (to them) markets, including residential and TAB, and in political advocacy for the skilled trades.

“We need coordinated efforts to drive more people to the trades and leveraging new or different labour pools,” said one respondent. “We need this to grow the industry, create cultural awareness and acceptance, and dispel or reduce sexism and racism in the trade.”


Support Needed

Contractors closed the survey with several suggestions for the type of support they would like to help support their businesses as they move into 2023. See below for a list, and keep an eye on your email for development opportunities offered through SMACNA dinner meetings and on-going professional development.



SMACNA-BC Member Support Wishlist 2023

1. Recruitment support: 73%
2. Management training: 45%
3. Grants & tax incentives: 20%
4. Business operations: 20%
5. Political advocacy: 16%
6. Cultural awareness, diversity, equity & inclusion: 18%
7. General education and training: 13%
8. Other: 13% (market expansion [ie, schools, IAQ], communication skills, labour-management development to support training in new areas, leadership, event planning, TAB, strategies to help smaller business and job shops survive against cheaper outsourced markets, labour-management cooperation. ■

SMART Local 280 / SMACNA-BC Partnership



Left: Jud Martell, Local Union No. 280 President.
Right: Phil McDonald, Summit Sheet Metal Ltd., SMACNA-BC President.

Labour & Management

“Embracing the Challenge”

- B. Flaherty, Cornell University, Syracuse, N.Y.



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Business in a Connected World – Part II

By / Ron Coleman

Since 74% of consumers rely on social media when making purchase decisions, you need to be visible when they search. Contractors are continuing to have problems hiring and retaining employees, and a good social media presence can help the business with recruitment.

If this is your first dabble, don't get overwhelmed. Start slowly with one platform and build up if necessary. You may have one or more platforms already on the go, but you may not be maximizing them.

Set measurable goals. You may wish to achieve a target number of enquiries or increase the number of people engaging with

your posts with comments or by following your channels. Define the outcomes you want.

Know your audience. Who is already interested in your business? Building on that, who do you want to target? The more you know about your key demographic, the more relevant information you can provide and the better results you will get.

Choose platforms that facilitate your goals. Different platforms attract different people, provide different functions, and have different ways of delivering your content. It is essential that you choose the platform(s) that will best connect with your target audience.

Add good content regularly. The biggest mistake companies make is frequency—posting too often or not enough to keep followers engaged. A good guideline is twice weekly, but there is wiggle room, depending on the best use of your chosen platform(s).

North America’s most popular social media platforms in 2022, in no particular order, were:

- YouTube
- Facebook
- Instagram
- Pinterest
- LinkedIn
- Snapchat
- Twitter
- WhatsApp

Start with your website, email, and customer relations management (CRM) software—all of which should connect seamlessly with your social media strategy.

Website – This is the easiest place to start building your internet presence. Review it, tailor it to meet your goals, and integrate other social media platforms by posting their icons and links.

Email – Email marketing has declined slightly in popularity, but those who are successful with it ensure informational,

timely content that is connected with and promoted through social media channels.

CRM – Integration between CRM software and social media—social CRM—allows your team to connect with customers using the platform they (the customer) prefers for better engagement.

Facebook – Connects with a profile and business groups or pages, and is most popular among a 35 and older demographic. Facebook has specific, searchable sub-groups and special interest groups that can provide good market information. Facebook ads and boosted posts are targeted and provide a good ROI.

Facebook Messenger – Although attached by name to the platform, Facebook Messenger does not require a Facebook account. It is simple to use for sharing photos, videos, audio recordings, and chat groups.

LinkedIn – This is a great, profile-driven platform used mainly for finding professionals and potential employees. While less likely to generate direct sales, companies have high engagement through articles, white papers, and free or low-cost training and webinars. Again, check out the sub-groups. The demographic tends to be working professionals of all ages, recruiters, business owners, and C-suite executives.

Instagram – Great for showing before and after pictures or highlighting new products or services because it is visually focused with image filters, reels, and stories. Instagram users have high engagement rates with an 18-45 year old demographic and do exceptionally well offering contests as a marketing tool.

YouTube – YouTube contains an amazing amount of “How-to” information and product reviews. Anytime I need handyman ideas, I go to YouTube. Its content is relevant to all age groups, though the youngest demographic (13-24) has ventured over to TikTok for shorter, punchier content.

TikTok – This has become very popular for video clips, particularly with audiences 13-24. This is the fastest growing platform, and though a lot of the content is created for humour and entertainment, it has proven a great source of product influencers and recruitment attention.

Snapchat – Snapchat reaches over 75% of the Millennial and Gen Z population in North America. Almost 40% of their users are between the ages of 18-24. Although mainly used as a chat app, reels are also popular on this platform.

WhatsApp – WhatsApp is a free collaboration and communication tool with calling, messaging, video conferencing, and group management functionality. You can form groups and exchange ideas, so it could be used to connect employees or friends.

Reddit – Reddit is a great communication tool used by an open community to explore, exchange, and discuss ideas on

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various topics. Being open to the public, you have no control over the content, but you can be an influencer by providing ideas and answering people's concerns. To try it out, type in furnace, plumbing, or any other relevant topic and you will be surprised at how active it is.

Pinterest – One of the fastest-rising marketing platforms, Pinterest is a visually-enticing collection of “boards” on various topics. Each board is a collection of ideas, and the ideas link back to the creator’s website. It is a great way to draw customers who are actively looking for solutions.

Twitter – Twitter offers up 280 characters plus imagery per “tweet” with which you can get your message across. This was Donald Trump’s favourite communication platform until he was suspended. He had 89,000,000 followers.

Encourage visitors and engagement by making your page or group a valuable resource. Consider the topics you wish to cover and how you would like to share your message—written, audio, photos, video, or a combination. Here are some examples:

1. **Profile** – An employee, customer, or project before and after
2. **Product information** – Explain what a heat pump is and how to get grants for purchasing it or discuss the pros and cons of geothermal. Remember links to relevant follow-up information.
3. **Health care** – Indoor air quality, smoke, and carbon monoxide detectors.
4. **Maintenance guidelines** – How to winterize your water pipes, minimize energy costs, or maintain your furnace.
5. **Handyperson projects** – How to change a flapper, a washer, or a garburator.

The same information can be reposted on more than one platform, but try to use different imagery each time for wider engagement. Always have at least one month’s worth of content ready to go. Consistency is critical.

Be professional. Setting up and maintaining serious social media platforms is expensive and time-consuming, and if done poorly, the results can backfire. Treat negative feedback like an opportunity to show your customers how well you deal with it. Don’t have time to update your social media? Hire someone. It’s that important.

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THE ABUSE OF APPRENTICES STOPS NOW

“I can’t believe I signed up for this s***.”

And so began a tale of stupidity, short-sightedness, and tradition that reflects a broken culture and wasted talent.

The words were spoken to me by a young man after I gave a presentation to 400 young people serving their union apprenticeships. During my talk, I asked a question that I have been asking for over 10 years to well over 100,000 union craftsmen and women: “How many of you during your apprenticeship were hazed, teased, called names, given meaningless work, ignored, or not taught because the guy in front of you was afraid for their job?” And in that room, like the other 200 times before, 95% of the hands slowly rose into the air.

Ninety. Five. Percent. In the year 2022. Not 1970 or 1990. Today. Now.

The young man in question approached me at the end of my presentation. He waited until everyone else had left. He told me he had military leadership experience. He had seen and done more than any of his apprentice peers. He had joined a union and the apprenticeship to again be part of a team that cared about each other—but he found something entirely different.



By Mark Breslin
Apprentice Performance Solutions

His experiences included being degraded; given little to no mentoring or instruction; seeing his peers called names (though no one would do it to him, as he had that look in his eyes); and watching poorly performing journeypersons be treated with more attention and respect because they were friends with the foreperson. He felt he was part of a team only when it was funny to treat the low person on the food chain poorly.

Here is the future of our business. The ideal candidate, signing up with exactly the right reasons and a perfect foundation for success... but it had only taken him two years to go from enthusiasm and belief to “I can’t believe I signed up for this s***.”

This legacy practice of mistreating and degrading apprentices needs to end now, and it is the contractors first—and the union second—who have to start taking a stand. The current crop of apprentices needs to be the very last that is ever abused in the apprentice system as a stupid excuse for developing our young talent. It is being done by insecure people who had it done to them. And it is, decidedly, over.

I know some old-school guys are going to tell me that if you don’t have thick skin, don’t sign up; if you can’t hack it, then you don’t belong. I disagree. Talent development is not about hazing or mistreatment. It is about instilling confidence, skills, and belief through mentoring, guidance, and coaching. This is not always common behaviour in an industry that prides itself on toughness and independence. As well, many are going to say that the Millennial Generation is soft and has received too many trophies for too little effort. While some of that may be true, it doesn’t justify poor behaviour at the jobsite on the part of journeypersons whose pensions will someday be paid by those very same apprentices.

I would like to suggest three solutions to this challenge—one for the apprentice training staff, one for the contractors, and one for the union leadership — so each can play a part in a constructive evolution going forward.

First, apprentices must be given a true picture of what they are going to face. We cannot ignore the fact that this is going to be part of their experience. In my book *Survival of the Fittest* (and especially in the accompanying workbook), I outline role-playing



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INDUSTRIAL VENTILATION: MAKE-UP AIR IS ESSENTIAL FOR BALANCED VENTILATION

Exhaust fans cannot work properly without an adequate supply of air. If provision for the supply air is not made, the vacuum created by the exhaust fans reduces the effectiveness of mechanical ventilation. Negative pressure also causes excessive air infiltration, making it difficult to heat a large facility properly.

These conditions can be corrected by replacing the exhausted air with clean, fresh, preheated air. The primary purpose of this make-up air is to temper outside air and supply it in sufficient quantity to bring about a balance in ventilation.

Often, depending on the quantity of make-up air in relation to the exhaust, the heating system will shut down during the working day, allowing the make-up air to handle the entire heating load. The heating system then functions only to maintain satisfactory temperatures at night and in other critical times.

When you add an air make-up system to an existing plant, it is necessary to analyze the entire building. Where exhaust fans already exist, the installation of air make-up usually will not increase the heating load and can bring about a reduction of overall heating costs. This may be understood by considering that infiltrated air, warmed at least partially by an existing heating system, is ultimately mixed with room air and exhausted through the ventilation fans.

Infiltration of unheated air results in a decline in heating efficiency. Most heating systems are not adequately rated to cope with infiltration when appreciable negative pressures exist.

Air make-up units provide a systematic method of heating entering air and supplying it in a controlled quantity. With proper balance of supply and exhaust, infiltration is eliminated. By properly tempering supply air, the heating system is relieved of this abnormal load. The results are uniform space heating, effective ventilation, comfort, and economy.

Heating

Experience with fresh air heating systems has shown that it is practical and economically sound to heat larger warehouses and industrial plants with fresh air. The question is whether to use 100% outside air or re-circulate some portion. Design engineers use both methods.

When direct-fired gas systems were first used, some authorities felt that positive exhaust was necessary to assure a balance and prevent building up products of combustion. It is now generally recognized that air can be supplied into most buildings having a balance with a supply and exhaust system.

The standard air make-up unit used for large space heating can either be 100% outside air or with fixed percentages of re-circulation or a combination of both. Equipment suppliers can assist in determining your application requirements.



By Norm Grusnick, PEng
Sales Manager, ECCO Supply

Gas-fired air make-up units are available in various sizes and types, including direct or indirect fired configurations. The equipment is designed for tempering outside air and supplying it to the building for ventilation make-up and balancing of negative pressures.

Temperature Controls

Two standard systems for temperature control are available, offering a choice of functions for regulating air temperature.

The outlet temperature central system only senses the unit's discharge air temperature. The sensor is in the airstream, and it averages the temperature and sends back a signal to the regulator.

In most applications, it will be desirable to use room temperature controls. Two types of controllers are available for this operation.

The simplest and least expensive is a thermostat located in an appropriate location. When the area calls for heat, the make-up air unit delivers air at a higher temperature until the thermostat is satisfied.

The other method is modulating room temperature control. The sensor actuates a modulating regulator to provide an incremental increase or decrease of the discharge temperature, which provides closer control and more even temperature control.

Assistance in selecting the appropriate make-up air and ventilation systems is available from local equipment suppliers. ■

Caught you looking!

Got news or a great idea for a column? Email your ideas to jessica.kirby@pointonemedia.com and share your wow with your industry peers today.



THE DOG ATE MY HOMEWORK! THE DUTY TO KEEP PROPER RECORDS

The recent case of *Shaheen Custom Homes Ltd. v Brennan, 2022 BCSC 716*, exemplifies a situation that homeowners, builders, subtrades, and those alike could encounter in failing to maintain proper records during a construction project.

The Facts

This dispute was centered between a home builder, Shaheen Custom Homes Ltd. (“Custom Homes”) and its homeowner customers (the “Homeowners”).

In January of 2017, the Homeowners entered into a cost-plus contract (the “Contract”) with an “all-in” construction budget of \$267,890. As the Homeowners considered themselves handy and cost conscious, the Contract considered that they would do some of the construction work themselves.

As the Contract was “cost-plus”, the building price included the cost of all materials, labour, and services, plus an 18% fee to Custom Homes as the builder.

The Issue

The Homeowners had paid all progress draws without issue, which totalled more than \$214,000. However, they had concerns with Custom Home’s latest draw of \$26,789, which the Homeowners thought seemed high considering that the only remaining work was on the driveway, back patio, and railings.

The Homeowners also had concerns with certain line items in the budget. Custom Homes had updated actual costs from time

to time, which showed cost overruns for certain items, such as \$25,000 for an HVAC system rather than the budgeted amount of \$16,000. The Homeowners also had concerns that Custom Homes might have been charging for work being performed on other projects.

As a result, the Homeowners wanted to review copies of Custom Homes’ invoices and charges. In other words, the Homeowners wanted the details of what costs had been incurred under the Contract.

In March 2018, Custom Homes sent the Homeowners a revised budget but still no actual accounting of costs or the backup invoices or cheques. The Homeowners refused to make any further payment without the source documents for the invoiced amounts.

As a result, Custom Homes sued the Homeowners for non-payment and the Homeowners counterclaimed against the amount alleged to be outstanding under the Contract.

The Decision

In late 2019 and early 2020, Custom Homes produced the costing backup for its invoicing and email backup for its employees.

The Judge found that, in this instance, the Homeowners’ refusal to pay the final invoice was not a repudiation of the contract but rather, to the contrary, demonstrated an effort by the Homeowners to pay what was properly owed.

The Judge determined that Custom Homes had, in general, an obligation to keep proper accounts and records. Courts have held that this is necessary for contractors to establish their entitlement, but also to ensure that homeowners understand what they are paying for.

The Judge found that Custom Homes did not have specific or a reliable recollection regarding virtually any of the accounting disputes specifically raised by the Homeowners. The Judge also found that Custom Homes failed to provide any reasonably adequate accounting of the building costs until near the end of the trial.



By / Matthew T Potomak and
Liam M Robertson, Kuhn LLP

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THE SUPERVISOR'S ROLE IN SAFETY

There's a fundamental shift that occurs the moment a front-facing employee becomes the crew's supervisor, and the quicker you understand the shift, the faster you will get the team's buy-in.

If you're a supervisor, there's a very good chance that you were the rock star employee before you became a supervisor. You were probably a top performer with some pretty decent experience and even better results.

Your employer saw your talent and decided that you were the kind of person that they wanted other employees to be more like. So, they promoted you to supervisor to help the others.

You were the rock star. The hero.

Then, you became a supervisor, and everything changed.

Here's why it changed for you and how you can harness it to get better results for your team.

If you moved from employee to supervisor, there's a fundamental shift that occurs the moment you become a supervisor.

You really need to understand that fundamental shift in your responsibilities. You are now the coach, not the star player.

As a coach, your team is looking to you for a very specific set of skills in order to help them.

Your team doesn't care how good you used to be at their job. They want to know how good they're going to be with you as their coach. That's what is most important to them.

They want to know how you are going to help them to be better, more trusted, more respected, and how you will ready them for promotion down the road.

Like any good coach, your job is to improve the individual performance of each of the members of your team. Your primary responsibilities are to help them develop better skill sets, to care about their contributions, to recognize their great results, and to care about their safety.

You are the coach.

And as a coach, you need to make their safety your top concern. When they are safe, they work better. When they feel safe, and valued, and cared about, they give a better effort.

Your role in safety as a supervisor is to give your people what they want from the job so they can turn around and give you what you want.

But as the coach, you must go first. So, go first because that's what leaders do.



By / Kevin Burns

Remember: you don't need more rules and reminders in safety. You need more of your employees to buy-in. And that takes a very different approach.

“The moment you become a supervisor is the moment you stop being the star player and you become the coach of your team.”

Most companies don't have faulty safety procedures and they lack buy-in as part of their company culture. There are three steps to improving safety performance and employee buy-in that every supervisor should take. Here they are:

1. Build your overall leadership skills: No one has more influence in safety than frontline supervisors. Being a rock star doesn't necessarily preclude leadership skills or the specific type of leadership your team needs. Consider training in leadership and team building to create a team that buys in for the long haul.
2. Clarify and simplify the safety message: Build one clear and concise safety message that becomes the foundation of your safety communications. The best course is to involve employees in the development of this message, so it becomes something they can all connect with.
3. Engage employees with the benefits of safety: Give employees 52 good reasons to get behind safety and you will engage employees to buy in. Review, discuss, and produce deliverables (where appropriate) on one benefit per week for one year, and watch your safety culture change for the better.

Need more tips and tricks, training, or consultation? Visit kevburns.com and learn what Kev Burns Learning has to offer. ■

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CONTRACTOR ADVICE

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behaviours for classes to engage in and discuss. Spend ten minutes at the end of classes doing role-playing. Stand back and watch the wheels turn. How does an apprentice deal with hazing? How do they respond when told to “slow it down”? How do they ask for assistance or mentorship? How should they go about earning respect on the job? These are not technical skills but jobsite survival skills that every apprentice needs so they can get through the wringer until we change the culture.

Secondly, contractors need to draw the line: if you abuse, haze or mistreat an apprentice, you are fired. Forepersons are expected to develop apprentices or at least match them to journeypersons capable of maximizing their ability. Companies need to move away from the idea that apprentices are cheaper labour with limited skills and begin developing them as our future leaders and workforce. A change in mindset needs to precede a change in behaviour.

Finally, unions can help by standing up for apprentices and giving them the camaraderie they were first offered. The best part of being in the trades isn't the money; it's the people and the work and the pride that comes with doing something that you feel is important. Sharing that with others and seeing it play out every day, with everyone having each other's backs, is what it's all about. Every union in North America might consider an annual “Mentor of the Year” award for the journeyperson who is tops in developing apprentice talent. Make it visible. Talk about it at the hall. Put it in the newsletters. Bring the brotherhood (and sisterhood) back to union affiliation.

In summary, it is time for a change. Not every apprentice is going to make it, and we aren't running a babysitting service. If an apprentice doesn't have the heart and passion to be a tradesperson, maybe they need to do something else. But for every young man or woman who comes to us offering us the next 25 years of their life – their blood and sweat and best effort—we deserve to give them more. And the time is now. ■

IT'S THE LAW

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In short, the Judge found that Custom Home's had, in general, fell woefully short of their obligations to keep proper accounts and records. As a result of the foregoing, the court reduced the amount alleged to be owing under the Contract from \$8,167 to \$5,150 and ordered the Homeowners to pay the same.

Lessons Learned

Although the court in this case did not specifically consider questions of equity and fairness, this could be a viable defence should a contractor fail to maintain proper records. This case does not suggest that every instance of failure by a contractor to keep adequate records will result in a reduction in the contract price. However, if a contractor does not have adequate records, involving lawyers early can aid in planning other means of demonstrating that the homeowners received the invoiced value, such as by the use of expert reports.

Additionally, contractors generally have an implied duty to keep proper accounts and records in relation to cost-plus contractual arrangements, and if a contractor failed to keep proper accounts, this could create additional risks, such as invalidating a lien claim or foregoing a claim for contractual interest.

This article was written by Matthew T. Potomak and Liam M. Robertson, who are lawyers that practise in construction law with the law firm of Kuhn LLP. This article is only intended as a guide and cannot cover every situation. It is important to get legal advice for specific situations. If you have any questions or comments about this case or other construction law matters, please contact us at 604.864.8877 (Abbotsford) or 604.684.8668 (Vancouver).

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