

DEPARTMENTAL NEWS

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Marketing Issues

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Developing a Recruiting Strategy: Key to Our Future

The issue of recruiting, as repetitive as the subject matter may be, must be addressed. It is unequivocally the most important issue facing our union today. Recruiting needs to be looked at in two perspectives. First, we as an International Union, as many other building and construction trades unions, consist of a significant percentage of membership that will be retiring in the next five to ten years. The most recent data procured by the International confirms that the average obtained age of our membership is approximately forty years old. The average entry age into the industry is approximately thirty years old. Historical data has shown that both entry and obtained ages are moving upwards. The number of potential retirees will create a significant void in membership. Second, in order for our union to achieve real growth in market share, we need to recruit not only to fill the void created by a retiring membership, but to achieve a larger portion of the industry share.

This year alone there were several requests from locals throughout the country for additional skilled manpower for their employers. The response for the most part was dismal, in spite of everyone's efforts. In my discussions with locals, it is a priority issue. Resolving the issue, however, is the major barrier that needs to be addressed. If we are struggling to meet the current needs of our signatory contractors, how will we ever achieve real growth in market share?

The first step starts with joint labor-management cooperation. This issue affects the future of our union as well as our signatory contractors; therefore, the resolution should be jointly considered. Our goal is to increase market share nationwide, which cannot be achieved without either signing new contractors or obtaining the support of our signatories. I have discussed expanding our market share with numerous signatory contractors. Their most common concern is the ability of the local union to provide the skilled workforce to handle the potential increase in work. From the union perspective, we understand the difficulties in recruiting roofers - especially on short notice, as by and large most requests are made. Both labor and management need to openly discuss concerns and obstacles prior to developing a successful recruiting strategy.

The second step is to develop a plan to recruit new members, both skilled and unskilled. Recruiting new members, especially young apprentices, is an arduous task. It is not easy convincing young adults of the benefits of the union roofing industry, especially today when overall construction careers are not particularly high on their list of career choices. It is an unwarranted negative image that needs to be addressed. So we must continue promoting our industry to area high school and vocational school students, even if it only results in a few good apprentices a year. In addition, make sure your local is registered with the Helmets to Hardhats program, a great source for strong potential candidates. For recruiting experienced or semi-experienced roofers, we need to continue to enlist non-union roofers. This practice, as most locals can testify, has been very successful. Recruiting non-union roofers needs to be part of a weekly routine for locals, not just done when there are employer requests for additional manpower. Develop a list of potential non-union roofers who are interested in a career in the union sector and would be accessible when work becomes available. Each local needs to develop a plan that best meets their needs to achieve growth.

There is no magical cure for the recruiting issue. It takes a strategic plan with strong persistence and effort. Just remember the philosophy of this International Union from its beginning: we grew by one member and contractor at a time. At some point we failed to continue our original mission, to organize the unorganized. We need to revisit that original mission and grow by one member and one contractor at a time. We need to make recruiting new members and increasing our membership numbers and market share our number one priority. Our future is dependent upon our ability to grow. ■

Local 317 Banners Non-union Contractor



Local 317, Baton Rouge, LA, along with the support of the International Organizing Department, has initiated an organizing campaign in the Baton Rouge and New Orleans areas. Pictured are Simmie Tate of Local 317 and International Marketing Representative Baldo Diaz.