

Executive Director's Message



KIRK GRUNDAHL

"Finding & Growing the Right People to Build a Bright Future" by WTCA's Strategic Issues and & Executive Committees

The theme of this year's BCMC—People Building the Future—could not be more apropos. The demographics suggest that in all businesses, people will continue to be in short supply for some time to come. Given this, we must create an industry that potential employees find to be an attractive career opportunity.

One of the questions our members frequently ask is, "How do we increase the number of truss technicians in our industry?" This question has been discussed at great length at all of the Truss Technician Training™ committee meetings we have had since 1994. Here are summaries of the best thoughts and ideas our members have had on this topic:

- It is important to hire people that fit into the personality of your organization. You and your management team are the best group to assess this, using good interviewing techniques. Interviewing is a very important skill that someone in your firm needs to learn to do very well. In our company, Suzi has taken on this challenge and done exceptionally well, and we have learned a great deal with each new hire.
- Hire someone with local roots if possible. If you bring in someone from outside your local area there is a strong chance they will be moving again in the future.
- Take an active role in developing relationships with local high schools and community or technical colleges and universities. Look for students who have had exposure to the following industry pre-requisites:
 - **High School:** Algebra, Geometry, Trigonometry, Basic Computer Operations, Computer-Aided Design, Drafting & Computer-Aided Drafting, Building Construction.
 - **Community College:** Algebra, Geometry, Trigonometry, Basic Computer Operations, Computer-Aided Design, Drafting & Computer-Aided Drafting, Building Construction, Plan Reading, Building Codes, Principles of Engineering (Basic and Advanced), Physics, Wood as a Construction Material.
 - **Universities:** All course work required to earn a degree in Civil Engineering, Agricultural Engineering, Architectural Engineering, Mechanical Engineering, Construction Management or Architecture, with the major emphasis being in structures; Electives that are valuable for a career in the truss industry include Wood as an Engineering Material/Wood Design, Building Construction, Building Codes & Standards, Plan Reading/Plan Review, Business Marketing, Computer-Aided Drafting.

The relationships developed with these schools will help ensure that a supply of local talent is available to the truss manufacturer in time of need. Most community and technical colleges have solid construction-related courses that provide a potential employee with the needed baseline skills for our industry.

After developing this relationship, request that the schools give interested students the WTCA Certification Exam. This will give you excellent information about where the students in the class stand in terms of fundamental truss industry concepts and will also guide you on where you'll have to spend some initial time training, should you hire them.

- Once you find a new employee, it has been proven that the best approach is to take this person through an on-the-job training program. This includes having them go through WTCA's New Hire Truss Industry Familiarization and Fundamentals Program. This program, like all the TTT programs, was created by component manufacturers for component manufacturers. The program consists of an outline of all the material that our membership believes would provide excellent grounding in the truss industry. This program can be undertaken in your facility or at the employee's home. This, along with three to six months of hands-on work in your facility, should allow you to determine if the new hire is going to succeed and where the person will best fit inside your organization. At the end of that period, the employee should take the WTCA Certification Exam to assess the current skill level, and then take the appropriate WTCA Truss Technician Training program for the desired industry competency level.

- Obviously this training does not include truss design software training. Those supplying engineering services to our industry have great training programs for their software. Our members thought it best that we not train on software, but keep our program structured to truss industry fundamentals.

Our members believed it would be most effective to do some assessments of competence and potential before making the investment in software training, after having been burned a few times with employees that were trained on software, only to learn that the truss business was not a good fit for them.

Developing local relationships, finding the right people and growing your technical staff requires hard work on your part. If it is done with energy and is viewed as an important company priority, you will soon experience success in finding high quality local talent that is looking to keep their roots within the community where they grew up and where their family lives.

GROWING YOUR COMPANY'S TECHNICAL ACUMEN

WTCA has invested over \$140,000 to develop and implement our Truss Technician Training programs specifically to grow our industry's technical skills. We have just recently gone through each program and taken the feedback from all the evaluations and made the needed refinements and improvements. Our new and improved programs are:



- Truss Basics—This one-day course provides participants with wood truss fundamentals. Salespeople, estimators, office staff and those new to the industry will benefit from this overview of truss manufacturing. This quick, inexpensive, and extremely value-added course is designed to enable staff at every level to communicate knowledgeably and effectively with customers, suppliers and other industry professionals. This course was formerly called “TTT for Salespeople” or “TTT Sales.”
- Level I: Truss Basics, Truss Design, Math & Introduction to Load Development—This four-day Truss Technician Training course introduces wood truss design to technicians, estimators and others in your organization who must have a greater understanding of truss design and engineering fundamentals. Students perform calculations, solve problems, review presentations and participate in class discussion. They examine industry design standards and factors affecting truss fabrication, from reading the plans all the way to design and installation.
- Level II: Load Development, Building Codes and Standards—This four-day course builds directly on topics covered in the Level I TTT. Students develop an advanced understanding of truss design principles, loads, load development, field connections and field repairs. Students will receive and review design standards such as ANSI/TPI 1 (the National Design Standard for Metal Plate Connected Wood Truss Construction), ANSI/ASCE 7 (Minimum Design Loads for Buildings and Other Structures), and the NDS® (National Design Specification® for Wood Construction).
- Plan Reading—This four-day course focuses on plan reading skills for Truss Technicians, salespeople, estimators and others in your organization that require a greater understanding of plans and takeoffs. Students learn plan terminology, symbols, scales, framing layouts, and truss and material take-offs. Students also spend a considerable amount of time reviewing actual residential and commercial plans while focusing on design responsibilities, construction assemblies and details, and special loading requirements that affect truss design.
- Level III: Advanced Topics in Truss Design—This four-day course is presented in a seminar format with time devoted to class discussion of significant technical issues. Each day, industry professionals examine technical design considerations in a focused setting. Participants will elevate their understanding of this highly specialized industry and receive answers to unresolved technical questions. The Level III course is open to Level II certified technicians, design managers and truss designers (truss design engineers). Topics will vary depending on participants' questions, but in general will cover fundamental/theoretical design considerations and then how to apply these in the real world, the business risk associated with designing trusses, durability and serviceability issues, understanding and applying the building code to expand your business, and finally some of the special truss industry issues we face and how to best tackle these in the marketplace. During this session there is also a very educational and interesting tour of the Forest Products Laboratory in Madison.

A question frequently asked and certainly one that is fair is, “Does this training help?” Don Hershey, who always tests and critiques programs aggressively, gave the

best answer that I have ever heard:

“I was not sure that the WTCA TTT program was going to be worth it so I decided to put it through the best test I could think of. We gave 15 of our technicians the certification exam and got the scores back. We then went through our typical managerial review process and ranked the 15 based on their ability and performance. Much to our surprise, WTCA’s TTT ranked them identically to our ranking except in one case—our 7th ranked person was 6th in TTT and vice versa. We continue to use WTCA TTT today and have developed our wage scales around performance within the WTCA TTT system.”

WTCA QC: A PERSONNEL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM?



WTCA QC™ is another WTCA program that, at first glance, does not look like it has anything to do with helping motivate, challenge and retain people. However, in today’s tight labor market, truss manufacturers are looking for an effective management strategy, made up of powerful tools to accomplish these difficult objectives. WTCA QC can be used as part of this strategy. Specifically, the program is an effective means of training and then objectively quantifying employee performance.

Training and performance evaluation go hand-in-hand. When less-than-desired performance is discovered, you pinpoint the area that is suffering and give more training to educate the employee. But how do you determine which areas are suffering? This is the main purpose of WTCA QC. Inspections are done on a weekly basis for every crew working in your plant. After the data is entered into the computer, you have a very powerful database to pinpoint problem areas. Would you like to see if a specific crew is having a problem with hammering plates? You can do that. Would you like to check member-to-member gaps, which might indicate problems at the saw? You can do that too. WTCA QC allows you to create graphs that focus on any area of inspection, as well as looking at specific tables or crews.

It is easy to create an environment that reinforces the positive aspects of performance by using WTCA QC. In the same way that reports can show problem areas, they can also show those crews that are excelling in quality. Using this information, you can then use one of several methods to provide your employees a positive incentive to making quality trusses:

- Make a competition between crews to see who can have the best reports per week or month.
- Find a way to reward high-scoring crews, perhaps with some kind of bonus or gift certificate.
- Acknowledge high scorers at company gatherings, with certificates of quality, etc.

Acknowledging those who do good work is a great way to help individuals create pride in what they do, which will create a win/win situation for everyone involved for the longest time.

WTCA has made significant time and monetary investments in these two programs. At issue is that any program that WTCA develops is only as valuable as individual members make it in their specific businesses. Those who are willing to take and use these programs creatively to manage their businesses, find a great deal of value. WTCA is in the business of creating the tools. We hope our membership can utilize these tools to improve their business and profits.

• *“By using WTCA QC we have improved the performance of individuals. It doesn’t work to have just one person being in charge of quality, especially when we have so many people in production. Before we put the program in place, people didn’t pay as much attention to plate placement or gaps. Now they take more responsibility... it goes without saying that more attention to detail leads to fewer mistakes, which saves us money.” — Michael*

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**Karceski,
Atlas
Components,
Inc.**

• *“We use WTCA QC as a tool to educate our employees so that our quality will constantly improve. It has helped our QC inspectors become more knowledgeable, which helps them make better, quicker decisions at the assembly table.”—Rich Pearce, Richco Structures*