SMACNA and SMART work together to prove, if you build it, they will come ...
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Ahead of the Curve

The Associated General Contractors of America (AGC) recently made a statement calling upon the construction industry to take a bold and visible step towards creating a diverse, safe, welcoming, and inclusive construction industry:

“The recent tragedy in Minneapolis reminds us that our communities are scarred and in need of healing. The construction industry has a responsibility to respond in a productive way by demonstrating that it provides opportunities for everyone to advance, prosper, and succeed. Now more than ever, it is important that construction sites and offices across the country be welcoming and inclusive places to work.”

The organization launched a related national initiative called the Culture of Care that involves pledging to:

• COMMIT to hire and pay based on skill and experience regardless of ethnicity, gender, nationality, race, or religion;
• ATTRACT prospective employees by creating inclusive workplaces that are free from harassment, hazing, and bullying;
• RETAIN high-performing employees by identifying and removing barriers to advancement; and
• EMPOWER every employee to promote a culture of diversity and inclusion.

I’m happy to say that SMACNA and SMART are ahead of the curve and have been working together for many years towards such efforts. This issue’s content primarily focuses on the idea that in order to strengthen our industry, we need to think big and ensure that we don’t create any artificial limits on our recruiting efforts, and further, that we ensure all those who enter our industry know they are truly welcome.

(Check out page 6 where Leah Rambo, director of training for Local 28, reminds us that a lot of skills are transferable. For example, the hand-eye coordination required of a hair stylist can be directly applied to welding.)

Soph Davenberry, CTO of the National Energy Management Institute Committee (NEMIC), began her sheet metal career as an apprentice in 1996. (Read about her efforts to open the doors for new recruits across the sheet metal industry starting on page 7.) She is an advocate of letting go of our assumptions about who can do sheet metal work in order to expand our horizons exponentially.

The rest of our issue provides examples of how being able to quickly adjust strategies and operations to take advantage of changes in the market, shifts in the economy, and availability of workforce is vital for the success of our industry. Bright Sheet Metal and Local 20 have been an outstanding example of this during the COVID-19 crisis as they designed and built intubation boxes that give doctors and nurses an extra layer of protection against a novel virus. (See the story starting on page 10.) Clark Ellis, a principal and founding partner of Continuum Advisory Group who spoke at the Partners in Progress Conference earlier this year, rounds out the issue with advice on how agility in leadership creates high performance and more cohesive teams.

One of the things the Best Practices Market Expansion Task Force Committee has put together to help you be more agile as a contractor, Local, training center, labor-management cooperation trust or committee, or chapter is a recruitment initiative that seeks to leverage the online consumer market and out among the rest in a genuine, meaningful way.

We’ve developed an online ordering system that allows you to customize the materials we’ve created and order recruiting resources. You can select your campaign, customize to your Local, and get materials delivered by logging onto the private portion of the Partners in Progress web site at pinp.org and choosing Recruiting under the Resources menu. (Contact info@pinpmagazine.org if you have any difficulties logging in.)

Furthermore, we’re hosting a webinar on Tuesday, June 9, at 2 p.m. Eastern (11 a.m. Pacific) to provide information about the recruiting resources available, a walking deck for use when presenting to local schools and guidance counselors, and Brand Ambassador winners. Details about how to access the meeting are available on pinp.org on the Recruiting page.

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“When I started as the training director back in 2011, I made it my mission to start pushing the recruitment of more women in our industry,” says Leah Rambo, director of training for Local 28, Metropolitan New York & Long Island. “Back then female members accounted for only 3% at our apprenticeship program, but after continuous recruitment efforts and introducing a direct entry program, we managed to increase that number to 11%.”

In Rambo’s own words, the way to do it was to become a “pain in the neck” by continually asking why women weren’t being recruited and offering help to find ways to attract suitable candidates. It was a strong approach, but one that worked.

However, Rambo says that when they reached the 11% mark she made the mistake of thinking that upward curve
Partners in Progress

May 2020

“When we started up the Women’s Committee back in 2018, we told the women we would be available to help facilitate whatever they needed, but they were adamant that they wanted us at the meetings,” says Mike Mooney, president/business manager at Local 18. “We learn so much. Their devotion to the trade is second to none.”

Local 18’s staff originally came up with the idea of creating a women’s committee after realizing they needed help, not only attracting women into the industry, but also retaining them. “There has always been an issue with getting minorities in the trade in Wisconsin—and keeping them,” says Hallie Jennerman, statewide organizer. “We were at approximately 1% women and know SMART General President Joe Sellers would like to see a 20% female rate, which is ultimately our goal, too. We have a long road ahead of us, but we are committed. We understand it’s about listening to the needs of women in the industry and responding accordingly.”

In addition to holding regular meetings and outreach programs, Local 18 is extremely active in the marketing space. To raise awareness of Local 18’s Women’s Committee, the team came up with the concept of Rosie The Tinner—a figure that acts as a symbol to demonstrate the power and strength of women in the industry.

“Would naturally continue. “I slowed down my efforts because I thought it would increase organically, but it was way too soon to celebrate,” she says. “The numbers started to drop. I realized you can never take your eye off the ball. We ramped up our efforts again and started knocking on doors. Today, we are up to 14%, the highest in the nation for sheet metal.”

Local 28 is proof that to succeed you cannot take your foot off the accelerator. Organic growth won’t happen overnight, or even in 10 years, for that matter. “According to statisticians, the celebration number—before organic growth can actually happen—is closer to 30%,” Rambo explains. “My goal was to have 20% women by 2020, but with what is happening right now with COVID-19, I won’t end up having the recruitment. But, I know that, because of my efforts in getting the word out there, the direct entry into the industry will be about 25% women.”

Across the country there are examples of efforts underway to address the challenge of attracting women into the industry, one of which is to create women’s specific groups. The goal is also to make the industry a more comfortable and welcoming space that will not only benefit women in the industry today, but also will iron out issues to better pave the way for future sheet metal sisters.

However, don’t be mistaken. This isn’t a “ladies only” coffee get-together. Over at the Local 18 Women’s Committee in Wisconsin, for example, the men are extremely active in the group, at the request of the women.

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"We started out by making hardhat stickers of Rosie the Tinner to draw attention to the Women’s Committee, and it really took off," says Stu Wilson, Local 18 business representative. "Then we started making t-shirts with Rosie the Tinner on them, and recently, we have been sending out the stickers with metal nose strips we’ve been manufacturing to help make homemade face masks more effective against COVID-19. We have had women calling us up asking about the stickers. It’s about getting the message out there, however we can, to a wider audience."

When it comes to one of the most effective means of attracting women into the trade and making them feel welcome, beyond word of mouth of course, SMACNA and SMART are in agreement that there is no stronger message than to have women in the industry.

"Recently, I was on a panel for women in construction and we all mentioned that we never intended to get into the position we are in," says Angie Simon, president of Western Allied Mechanical in California and SMACNA national president. "I mean, I never desired to be the president of my company. At the end, during the Q&A, this young lady from the audience said that she didn’t understand why I didn’t want to be the president of my company and explained, ‘I see you guys and that’s what I want to be.’ You have to see it to want to be it. I think the challenge for us back when I got into the industry was that we didn’t think it was a possibility because there were no women in those positions."

Simon adds that while this is slowly changing, there are still very few women at the top, so a change in attitude of the guys at the top is needed to reach the goal of doubling the number by 2025. "We are fortunate to have Joe Sellers, who is not just talking the talk, but walking the walk," Simon says. "He joins in on women’s leadership groups and listens. He is committed to making a difference."

Over at Local 18, they are actively seeking out females to run for leadership positions and encouraging promotion within. And as Simon says, it’s not about getting the numbers up, but about getting the best person for the job. "We hire the best available people, and it so happens that a lot of times it’s a woman. It’s not that we focus on women, but having a woman in the leadership position definitely helps attract other women."

Rambo says that in order to move forward successfully, the industry needs to listen. "If you are the president of your Local, ask your members and staff, ‘Would you like your daughter to come and work in the industry?’ If they say no, then ask why. We have to be willing to look the ugly in the face."

Natalie is an award-winning writer who has worked in the United Kingdom, Germany, Spain, the United States, and Canada. She has more than 23 years experience as a journalist, editor, and brand builder, specializing in construction and transportation.

ADVICE FROM THE EXPERTS:

"Mentorship is one of the most important factors in any recruitment/retention plan, so create mentorship opportunities for women, take women to trade shows and recruitment fairs, and ask women to speak to their friends and relatives about the opportunities that exist in our trade. And when opportunities for extra training or advancement arise, ensure everyone has equal access.” – Julie Muller, executive vice president of SMACNA Western Washington

"It’s pretty cut and dried that we won’t tolerate any kind of bullying or hazing. We won’t allow it. The women know that and know that we mean it. It helps them feel more confident and comfortable.” - Hallie Jenerman, statewide organizer at Local 18, Wisconsin.

“You need to figure out a way to fast track somebody into your board of directors. Women need to be seen in the upper levels. They can’t just be HR director or accountant. A woman in a leadership position is going to make a big difference for the young ladies coming into the industry.” - Angie Simon, president of Western Allied Mechanical in California and SMACNA national president.

“You have to realize that a lot of skills are transferable and get that message out there. For example, a hair stylist—that is still transferable to a trade because of the hand-eye coordination required. My niece was a hair stylist and is now one of the best welders I know.” - Leah Rambo, director of training for SMART Local 28, Metropolitan New York & Long Island.

“Mentoring other females in the industry is by far the best part of my job. Watching them gain confidence makes me proud and hopeful for the future of the industry. Reach out to other women and find a mentor. Then return the favor and mentor others. We are all in this together!” - Nicole Billings senior project manager, Intech Mechanical, Roseville, California.
SOPH DAVENBERRY began her sheet metal career as an apprentice in 1996. Like most, she started in commercial HVAC and general sheet metal.

“I had no clue what sheet metal was before I got into it,” Davenberry says. “Even though I already had a college degree, I was working part time, not making very much, and I responded to an ad in the newspaper looking for math abilities, that said, ‘women and minorities encouraged to apply.’”

Although she had volunteer experience at Habitat for Humanity from her time at New College of Florida and a knack for working with her hands, she says she may not have realized apprenticeship was for her without that last phrase. “Turns out it’s been a great match these past couple of decades!” she says.

Davenberry expanded her skills to study testing, adjusting, and balancing (TAB) in 2004. She was drawn to it after taking a one-week 40-hour crash course on the topic and by interest in having a broader set of skills for greater employment. “I’ve barely had any time off since,” she says. “TAB is needed everywhere duct is installed, and then in quite a few other places. I also like that, in performing TAB work, I contribute to better systems operation for the client.”

After completing her TAB apprenticeship, Davenberry spent a decade as a lead systems field engineer with Neudorfer Engineers. While earning a second bachelor’s degree in Sustainable Building Science Technology at South Seattle College, she moved on to spend almost two years at Hermanson as TAB manager before joining the National Energy Management Institute Committee (NEMIC) as chief technology officer (CTO) in 2019.

NEMIC identifies and develops market and educational opportunities for members of SMACNA and SMART in several ways, one of which is ICB/TABB program certification. It is the first of its kind to gain ANSI accreditation for certification in the testing, adjusting, and balancing and HVAC fire life safety industry.

In her position as CTO, Davenberry is responsible for identifying new technologies, market developments, and trends for technicians and contractors. “I’ve always been a passionate lifelong learner,” said Davenberry. “In my CTO role, I can revisit all the training I have, and I can give back to our industry.”

And give back she does, to the industry through NEMIC and in her Seattle community as a “video jockey” for the Westside Unitarian Universalist Congregation (WSUU) audio-visual team where she helps edit videos and broadcast virtual services.

But beyond her work and volunteerism, Davenberry brings to the table a skillset that has the potential to open the industry to a wider audience—the ability to motivate others through public speaking. She honed her skills as a Youth-to-Youth apprentice, talking with other workers about the importance of having a right to, among other things, adequate training to practice the craft well.

“My conversations then and now require connecting the dots between bold values, such as safe working conditions and quality performance, to more specific examples, such as ANSI-rated safety glasses and a report with a TABB certification stamp,” she says. “People need to understand why something matters for it to grab their attention. When I can demonstrate the reasons why a trained, skilled, and certified workforce...
makes a difference in building performance to the people making hiring decisions, such as building owners and design professionals, then the value SMART and SMACNA bring to our industry is fully realized.”

Moving forward, especially in times like these, training, recruiting, mentorship, and technology are all opportunities and challenges for labor and management partnerships.

“We are definitely competing to recruit people into our industry as we face increasing numbers of retirees for the next decade,” she says. “We are living during an unusual time when four generations of workers are on the job side-by-side.”

Using the apprenticeship model that combines classroom and on-the-job learning already creates the structure for conveying the hard-earned lessons of experienced craftspeople to those new to the trade, and that interaction goes both ways—the incoming workforce is also teaching the nuances of emerging technology to journey level coworkers.

As effective as the apprenticeship model is, however, the industry has many other aspects to address. “The pressures of increasing family care needs for young children and aging parents, new requirements for work environments for professionalism and sanitation (even beyond the pandemic), and more virtual and physically integrated technologies are all considerations those of us responsible for looking ahead in the industry take into account,” Davenberry says. “Because we are the premier trade still fabricating our own materials, I think we are uniquely positioned to be able to provide more flexibility to meet these changing demands than might be found with other crafts.”

She believes technology has the potential to change and improve productivity and workforce expertise, and points to the popularization of plasma tables more than 20 years ago as an example. Despite speculation that the industry would lose layout skills with new workers, while wiping out positions for elder members, some of the industry’s best successes have come from embracing that technology, so now experienced field installers can also become the best digital detailers.

“Our industry has such a variety of expertise, from building enclosure systems to finely machined parts, from custom layout to full building energy assessments, that our adaptability is one of our best traits, and one that can’t be replaced by even the most sophisticated digital systems,” Davenberry says. “With tools like enhanced reality, we have even more avenues for leveraging our various abilities rather than being limited by them.”

For example, she explains, a senior service technician can supervise the work of several other techs in the field while seeing and hearing what they do through remote technology. Field layout points are now lightning fast and more accurate when supported by computerized systems, but it is still members and contractors who perform and coordinate that work and recognize when an aspect of the real world has been overlooked in the design.

“Training on a virtual lift can prepare a worker to be a better driver at a live job site,” she adds. “We have lighter power tools and wireless connections to extend our reach. Building performance can be modeled digitally, but it still requires proper placement of the sensors by workers in the field, and human understanding of the data to adjust systems for peak efficiency.”

Members of the sheet metal industry are their own best advocates, but they underrepresent themselves all the time, Davenberry says. “People at large recognize plumbers, electricians, and carpenters, and know ducts are the most ready escape out of many a tight spot in a movie plot, but they don’t realize that it is sheet metal workers and contractors who build the duct, construct the beautiful architectural features, and verify isolation rooms in hospitals are truly maintaining the right pressure gradients,” she says.

Advocacy and mentorship play important roles in ensuring recruitment and retention numbers remain high in all demographics moving into the future.

“I wish that growing up I had known what a sheet metal worker does, and that a sheet metal worker could look like me,” Davenberry says. “We have a tradition of thinking that this is a trade handed down through familial generations. While that has certainly gotten us a long way, we would do better to also take pride that we come from a variety of backgrounds and offer a variety of skills and solutions for all kinds of environments.

“I think if we can let go of our assumptions about who can do sheet metal work, then the horizons for our future are expanded exponentially.”

Jessica Kirby is a freelance editor and writer covering construction, architecture, mining, travel, and sustainable living for myriad publications across Canada and the United States. She can usually be found among piles of paper in her home office or exploring nature’s bounty in British Columbia’s incredible wilderness.
I am a third generation sheet metal worker. I guess it was always something I felt was a possibility if I really needed it. I just remember telling my dad that I needed to get a job, and we went and filled out an application. A few months later, I took my test. I went to NEW, which is Nontraditional Employment for Women, a small apprentice program that preceded my sheet metal apprenticeship.

My family has been restoring old cars and one thing they need is welding. Living in New York, cars go through all sorts of weather. So, when I saw my dad welding parts of the car back together, I thought that was so cool, and I wanted to do it.

I was just at the new Headhouse in LaGuardia Airport. It was my first field work where I was allowed to do more welding by myself. We installed railings around the perimeter of each floor to prevent people and luggage from damaging the walls. It was definitely an experience I won’t forget. I have always been on the other side of the industry, so doing the work and seeing the problems that occur on the field was different.

I was lucky enough to compete twice in Local 28’s Apprentice Competition. It was an amazing experience. I was able to meet other apprentices in other Locals and see how different we are. Even a Local that is two hours away does things vastly different. I was the only female in my first competition. The second time I went, I was so happy to see three other females competing and showing what we can do.

Being a third generation sheet metal worker has been a bit of a challenge because I am coming out from my family’s shadow and trying to set myself apart. Being a woman in this industry is not easy, but it has definitely made me stronger. You have to instantly grow thicker skin, and there are always people who want to stand in your way. You learn how to be the bigger person super quick in that kind of environment. I would love to show my daughter that you can do anything you put your mind to, no matter what it is.
MENTION BRIGHT SHEET METAL INC. to Tracy Wilson, and the executive director of Sheet Metal Contractors of Central Indiana & Fort Wayne will talk about the company’s decades-long support of not just SMACNA and SMART, but also the greater community.

“But with regards to COVID-19, the people behind Bright and Local 20 have really outdone themselves,” she says.

Wilson is referring to co-owner Gary Aletto and his team designing and building intubation boxes that give doctors and nurses an extra layer of protection against the highly contagious virus while preparing patients for ventilator care.

Rob Groff, project manager for Bright Sheet Metal, says, “As of late April we’ve made about 35 boxes that have been distributed as far away as Duke University in North Carolina—and it looks like we’ll be building at least 100 more in the weeks to come.”

The project began when a doctor within Indiana’s Community Health Network read a story about how intubation boxes in Taiwan protect health care workers while they insert tubes into the trachea of patients, one of the riskiest procedures on the front lines of the coronavirus fight.

Aletto explains, “The biggest concern of doctors was, even though there are face shields, the personal protective equipment is limited. The box provides another layer so that if the patient is coughing or any particles are coming out, the shield on top will block all of those particles.”

Bright Sheet Metal, a custom fabrication specialist with a long history of serving hospitals in its home state (in addition to HVAC and air and hydronic balancing, it has built operating tables and other components for health care use), was contacted by the doctor and given details about the Taiwanese boxes. “We received drawings Friday morning, and by 5:30 that afternoon we had a rough prototype ready,” Groff says.

Doctors at Community Health North in Indianapolis were impressed by the all-plexiglass design but requested a few changes. Over the weekend a new prototype was created, this time smaller, with two metal panels and two plexiglass panels, plus four sturdy handles and large grooves on the bottom so the box could lie across ventilation hoses without damaging them.

One of the plexiglass panels had two large holes through which a doctor can insert his or her gloved arms to perform the intubation. The adjoining plexiglass panel set at a right angle would allow the doctor to safely lean in close to the patient and monitor his or her progress.

Groff says, “That version of the prototype was approved the following Monday, and we quickly provided Community Health North with a run of 12 boxes, which were put into use immediately.”

Bright Sheet Metal constructed several dozen more boxes in rapid succession and then shipped them to other hospitals within the Community network. “At one point a doctor in New Jersey found out what we were doing and paid for a dedicated van to ship two boxes to his practice in that state,” Groff says.
“That shows how desperate some regions are for this form of protective equipment.”

The company also shipped 50 partitions for hospital desks, a simple but enormously effective barrier against the COVID-19 virus that has already proven successful in keeping workers safe in the retail food service sector.

Ironically, despite the prevalence of sheet metal workers across the country, Bright seems to be one of very few companies of its kind to have developed protective boxes—which it refers to as ‘Intu-shields’—for hospitals. “I conducted an extensive Google search and found just one metal worker in Pennsylvania who made a few boxes and donated them to local healthcare facilities,” Groff says.

As of late April, researchers at Duke University had approached Aletto and his team of skilled craftspeople to explore the idea of creating something akin to a portable isolation room for patients. “In simple terms, we would make a wider and longer box capable of being hooked up to a vacuum that would pull out the air and filter it through a HEPA system,” Groff says. “As such, the box would be a negative air chamber that could protect an infected patient as well as other nearby patients.”

Meanwhile, the potential for Intu-shields being used as the COVID-19 pandemic winds down is very strong. “We received a call from a local hospital requiring at least 100 units because elective surgeries will soon become available again,” Groff says. “We can fill that order in less than two weeks.”

Scott Parks, business manager at SMART Local 20, says, “The very nature of our business dictates that we have to be problem solvers at every level, and over the years Bright earned a reputation for always being able to build a better mousetrap, so to speak—and they have really distinguished themselves with the intubation boxes.”

Tracy Wilson is proud of the contractor and craftspersons for stepping up to the plate in a time of crisis. “But I’m not at all surprised,” she says. “The company has a long history of stepping up even during good times. Its president, Hank Meyers, is a long-time SMACNA board member and has also presided over many Local 20 initiatives, such as its health and welfare fund. His father, Phil, was equally dedicated, so you could say giving back is part of the corporate culture.”

Groff credits SMACNA and Local 20 for helping to develop Bright Sheet Metal’s expertise in providing high quality custom solutions to its clients, of which the Intu-shields are a shining example. “Collectively, they have raised the bar of quality for our profession in this state through training and mentorship, and we have certainly benefitted from that,” he says.

Aletto agrees, but he is humble when discussing his company’s role in helping the community fight back against the virus. “Everyone is trying to pitch in where they can right now,” he says. “We’re all scrambling to assist the healthcare groups whenever we can. Every little bit helps.”

Robin Brunet’s journalism has been published in over 150 magazines, newspapers, websites, and other media across Canada and the United States since 1982. He is also the best-selling author of two books: Red Robinson: The Last Deejay and Let’s Get Frank, as well as the upcoming book, The Last Broadcast.
**AGILE LEADERSHIP**

How Agility in Leadership Creates Higher Performance, More Cohesive Teams

Imagine a basketball player without agility. How would she play on the court? Dribbling the ball off her foot or accidentally tripping her teammates? What about a football player who lacks agility? Caught flat-footed as he goes to tackle a running back or tripping over his own feet as he tries to avoid an on-rushing defensive end. It’s easy to see how a lack of agility prevents athletes in most sports from functioning, let alone succeeding.

What about leadership? How important is it for organizations to quickly adjust their strategies and operations to take advantage of changes in the market? Does it matter if companies are not flexible enough to react to shifts in the economy, increases in material costs, reductions in the availability and skill level of labor? How crucial is it if training centers don’t implement retention plans, slack on marketing, or don’t get ahead of training for new markets?

During COVID-19, agility is clearly a virtue for most organizations—especially when it comes to leadership. With many operations going virtual, the industry needs a new way to work and the process, procedures, and software to make that happen. Enter agile leadership, defined as the craft of creating the right context for self-organization. It means organization leaders who create an environment where agile teams collaborate, learn from each other, get quick feedback from users, and are focused on quality and continuous learning. Agile leaders don’t micromanage people, nor do they create total freedom. Instead, the focus is flexibility, productivity, and being able to shift focus on a dime with minimal loses.

Critical foundational elements of agile leadership include transparency, measurement, delegation, accountability, and failing fast. Failing fast is so important because it saves organizations time and money, and it accelerates learning. It’s often what causes the pivot that results in a project being stopped or a repurposed success. Your job as a leader is to model and encourage these principles in your teams. It will be hard to adopt agile practices if your culture discourages critical thinking and feedback. When you fail fast, you usually fail small, but if people aren’t comfortable pointing out errors or fixes, you’ll fail slowly, sloppily, and at great cost.

In construction—already a cyclical working environment—agility hinges on productivity, flexibility, and the willingness to switch gears as necessary. If a contractor’s clients need solutions for temperature check stations that can be quickly and effectively disinfected, instead of new buildings, how can we shift our resources to work on that solution? If training centers identify new markets emerging from, say, a global pandemic, how quickly can the necessary training and equipment be implemented? Agile leadership can help us make success in those areas a reality.
Some aspects of agile do not fit construction perfectly. For example, agile is most easily deployed in situations where prototypes can be developed quickly and cheaply. It is hard to quickly and cheaply build different duct solutions or architectural metal elements that can be thrown away if they turn out to be wrong. However, what about the virtual world? The 3D modeling world is made for rapid prototyping. Contractors who use agile principles like “sprints” and “scrum” to collaborate with their internal and external teams can help their customers achieve the best solutions. Training centers using virtual or augmented reality training stations or product manufacturer-driven programs like the ITI’s strikeforce training can ensure quality, safe, and thorough workforce development is in place when it is required.

No matter your system, knowing exactly how your resources are deployed against projects or even daily tasks is important in normal times. Today, it is mission critical. A “sprint” is a set period of time—30 days maximum—during which specific work has to be completed and made ready for review. A “scrum” refers to a project’s iteration or completion of tasks to bring it to fruition.

Using this process for agile allocation and reallocation of resources can help you minimize crew downtime, maximize productivity, and preserve capacity so that you are ready when demand increases after the lockdown. For contractors who are involved in the sheet metal industry, lots of work should be coming your way. Building owners of everything from hospitals to office buildings and retail sites are going to rethink the way that they move air into, through, and out of their facilities. A robust, agile workforce must be at the ready to learn technology and make new techniques the reality.

Another construction best practice, the daily huddle or toolbox talk, is like the daily scrum meeting. Scrum itself is a broad framework and the daily meeting is only one element. It is a 15-minute max meeting where the team members share progress, bring problems to the table, and work out how they are going to move forward and what they will do between now and tomorrow’s meeting. The toolbox talk has always covered progress compared to plan, what could prevent us from reaching our goal, what safety concerns we see, and our goal for today.

And like the scrum meeting, an effective toolbox talk is run by the crew and features feedback from all members, people honestly sharing their concerns, problems, and roadblocks, and the team determining the path forward, including the production goal for the day. Make sure that these meetings are crisp and efficient though—keep them to 10-15 minutes and stick to the agenda. See the box for more tips.

How can we execute agile leadership in our current environment? In the short term, many of us are working with our project teams remotely. This means that you need to quickly get up to speed using virtual collaboration tools like Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Skype, and Google Meet to communicate with your people. Leaders who implement agile principles and achieve “agile-ish” practices are making their organizations more resilient during the crisis and are positioning themselves as leaders in the “next normal”. Moving towards agility is a great way to build resiliency into your organization permanently. While we may move past the peak of the COVID-19 crisis in a matter of months, there will be other challenges in the future. Supply shocks are likely to occur in waves or ripples as our supply chains recover from the quarantine’s disruption.

Working to build transparency, data driven decisions, autonomy, collaboration, and accountability in your leadership team and other project teams is the first step in becoming a more agile organization. The better you are at measuring and sharing that data, sprinting from one point to the next, and flexing resources where they are needed, the more your organization will thrive. You can be like that basketball player or football player who is prepared to react with agility to whatever their opponent or environment throws their way.

Clark Ellis is a Management Consultant and Principal with Continuum Advisory Group. He and his team focus exclusively on the construction industry and work with clients across the capital projects value chain globally. He is passionate about helping leaders at all levels in organizations grow and improve and has provided services to SMACNA and SMART. He made several presentations at the Partners in Progress conference this year. Handouts can be found at www.pinp.org

Continuum Advisory Group has developed a simple framework for making meetings successful. Implement these “4 Virtual Virtues” to make meetings quick and efficient:

1. Brevity: Shorten up your normal meeting time. Virtual meetings don’t hold attention like face to face.
2. Clarity: Make sure every agenda item is well thought out and has a clear purpose and outcome.
3. Concreteness: Strive to get real production from your interactions. Make decisions, share information, solicit feedback, and summarize and distribute action items and next steps.
4. Creativity: Don’t be afraid to engage your teams with things that are not directly work related. One of our clients started a project meeting recently by asking each person to share one word that communicated how they were feeling about the crisis. It was quick, demonstrated empathy, and engaged the team for a productive meeting. There are as many ways to be creative as there are blades of grass in a field.
We Can Do It!

Metal nose strips available for face mask production

SMART union members and SMACNA contractors across North America are donating materials and labor.

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