

# TEACHING THE NEWCOMERS HOW TO MANAGE TIME

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**A**ccording to the online Cambridge dictionary, the old cliché “you can’t teach old dogs new tricks” is said to mean that it is very difficult to teach someone new skills or to change someone’s habits or character. With over 20 years of research in the field, MCA Inc. finds this definition to be true in just about every industry, and it especially holds true in construction.

Studies show that most of our learning is done prior to adolescence, but our brains continue to develop into adulthood for those who exercise it with new and varied experiences. Even in adulthood, the brain is continuously remodeling itself. With that said, it is not impossible to teach a seasoned veteran of a trade a new way of doing things, but it will take a considerable amount of time to do so in comparison to someone who has never done the job before, like an apprentice. One of the tricks of the trade that electricians learn – and often are forced to learn, especially if they become foremen – is how to manage time. Time is nothing but a sequence of events, and learning how to manage events on the job site is not something that is taught in any depth at school for an apprentice. However, if an

apprentice can be taught how to manage the events of his day by scheduling and looking ahead, then look back to see how he did or what blocked him, he can be much more effective on the job site. If, on the other hand, he is added to the job site crew without any direction or schedule to follow, he will be relegated to making use of the time in the day without maximizing his learning and contribution to the job.

The construction industry is in the middle of a revolution and is facing challenging times. Pressure to increase productivity and reduce waste is on the rise. The days of big jobs with big profits are gone, and increased profits will have to come from a reduction in variable costs. Educating the workforce to be more productive will not only be essential for growth but necessary for both the local and national construction industry to survive the international takeover in today’s changing market.

This is where apprentices can prove to be very beneficial for both parties involved. Not only does the employer benefit from reducing their composite rate by utilizing a lower paid worker, they now have a worker with a fresh, eager mind wanting to learn and void of any embedded habits that

will be biased towards new methods and techniques. He or she will work and learn to be more productive with an open mind.

## ROLE OF APPRENTICES IN PRODUCTIVITY

Most of you have said or heard people say about apprentices, “I spend more time explaining things to him than I would if I just did it myself.” Or, “If I have an apprentice do it, I end up having to fix it anyway.” This logic is because the wireman sees a bigger view of the work on the job site and how to get it done than the apprentice sees. So, the challenge for the “old dogs” is breaking down the work to the point that the apprentice can produce effectively. There are two processes that a wireman, or any field leader, can use for accomplishing this: Work Breakdown Structure™ (WBS™) and Short Interval Scheduling® (SIS®). Both processes will have the work clearly defined, including what “done” means for the day and for the project, allowing the work to be handed off and followed up on easier with the apprentice. Then, passing on this method to the apprentice will help him or her learn how to see the work, schedule the work, and track the performance.



An apprentice can quickly grasp the value of breaking down the work using WBS™ so he or she can clearly see what needs to be done and how to go about doing it. They can then determine the direction of the project and schedule accordingly. Externalizing Work® with prefabrication and Agile Procurement™ will not come as a shock to them as they now will learn and treat these processes as a normal way of doing business, because they know no other way of doing business. The same holds true with the use of vital Work Environment Management (WEM®) programs, like SIS® and JPAC® in addition to ASTM's first construction productivity measurement standard (E2691). An apprentice will have no qualms when given the opportunity to see the obstacles that prevent them from getting done what they scheduled to do each day, and track how the project is progressing in real-time. This will give an apprentice more time to react when adjustments need to be made on the job site. This knowledge of the tools available to them will put your apprentices above the rest, setting themselves up for advancement and a long, lasting career.

## CONCLUSION

An apprentice has a great opportunity to get paid to learn a valuable trade, and they will gain first-hand knowledge of how the industry works, with the added benefit

to see whether or not the job is a good fit. If taught correctly, an apprentice has a great opportunity to exceed above the rest and will have ample opportunities to put their knowledge to work. Teaching an apprentice the principals and the tools of Agile Construction®, for example, will send a new worker out into the workforce with the knowledge to not only survive but to thrive in today's changing market, and it can only bring good things to the industry.

Apprenticeship is one of the best ways for a worker to acquire the experience and training he or she needs to get established in a career that they enjoy. Having Agile Construction® training in this industry is a quality well sought after by most employers. Being able to show that you have had on the job Agile Construction® experience – or better yet, an Agile Construction® Certification – will give an apprentice a huge advantage over other applicants when searching for their first job or having to relocate. Using apprentices in the workforce has proven to provide substantial benefits to both the worker and the business, and has been on the rise after a slight decline from 2007 to 2010 (FIG. 1), with the largest numbers in use geared towards the electrical contractors and plumbers (FIG. 2). Expanding apprenticeship programs in today's workforce can only help the industry be more stable,

with the ability to grow. By training the apprentices in the Agile Construction® methodologies – based specifically on WBS™ and Prefabrication in ASTM E2691 – the companies hiring these apprentices will save themselves significant training costs as well as see the benefits in their increased productivity and profitability.

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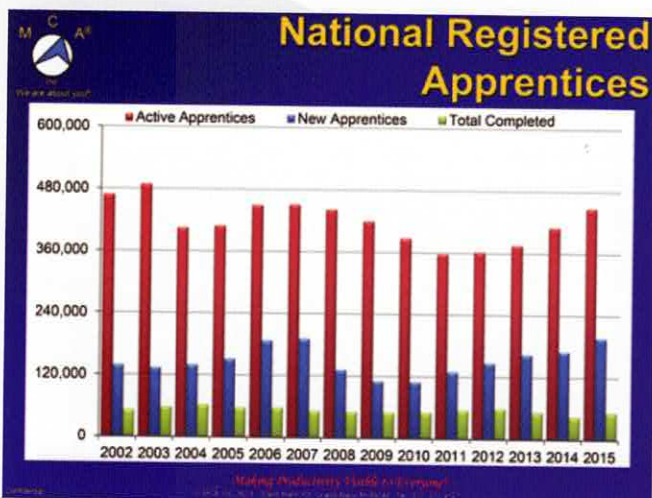


Figure 1

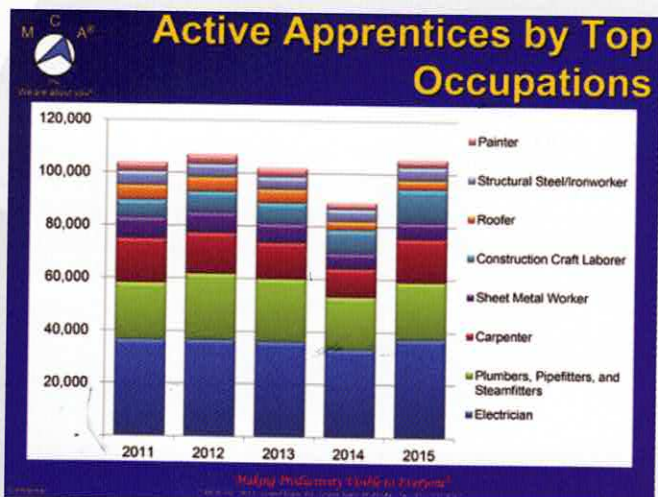


Figure 2