

WHAT IS SO HARD ABOUT SOFT CRAFTS?

BY ROY LEDBETTER

Recently, a Houston Business Roundtable audit team leader speaking at our audit review commented, "What is so soft about soft crafts?" He went on to say that the aptitude, the technical skills, and the physical demands required to safely perform soft craft trades is Hard Work. I could not agree more.

As with most trades in today's labor market, the soft crafts industry is facing increasing challenges and opportunities to recruit and diversify our workforce with candidates ready to go to work. Although this is not a new issue entirely, the recent years of changing dynamics are making recruiting and training critical to our industry's workforce.

With expanding manufacturing and other industries growing in Texas, today's workforce has more opportunities outside the energy sector. I have seen a break in the multi-generational workforce that has been the traditional pipeline for sustaining and growing the critical soft craft trades. Bringing awareness and visibility to the great careers in soft craft trades is crucial. It has caused us to re-think how we move faster to attract and train the workforce of the future.

Marquis has been a big supporter of the work being done in the area school districts Careers in Technical Education (CTE) programs. I was surprised by the 2022 class of industry applicants, where only 2% expressed interest in a "soft craft" trade opportunity.

So, at Marquis we are approaching the workforce with a new resolve and determination to find creative solutions. I believe prioritizing attitude and work ethic when hiring; along with creating a sense of family, has been a key component of Marquis success.

If an employee possesses the right attitude and work ethic, we can teach them the skills they need to be successful through our in-house training program and the Health and Safety Council. HASC continues to develop innovative training options such as Safety Essentials, which provides more effective training for entry level recruits that is more engaging and relatable and designed to be more easily retained than regular CBT training.

Additionally, Marquis is focused on embracing the diversity of our workforce whether it be age, ethnicity or gender. We recognize that a varied workforce not only broadens our applicant pool but enriches the talent and skill sets of our employees. If we want to continue attracting quality talent, we have to recruit from outside the traditional "funnel" of applicants.

Historically, the construction workforce has been predominantly male, but we're seeing more women take interest in our trades. We've found that women's attention to detail is a tremendous benefit and a great opportunity.

Additionally, Veterans' strong work ethic and acceptance of coaching make them a great addition to our team. Many of them possess an exceptional skill set, high aptitude for learning, leadership skills and a commitment to teamwork.

Marquis is continuing to invest our time and efforts in future generations. Our partnership with area high school CTE programs and other educational institutions provides us a platform to inform students of the benefits of soft craft trades. Participating in area forums and job fairs allows us to speak directly to students as they're making key career decisions. These opportunities are pivotal in bringing awareness and steering the future workforce towards great careers opportunities in soft craft trades.

For over a decade Marquis has supplied a safe and effective workforce for our industry. It is our responsibility as leaders to face this dynamic challenge head-on. We all must be committed to embracing the diversity of the workforce, educating the upcoming generations, and finding creative hiring solutions in order to maintain quality employees committed to safety in the workplace.



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