

Report urges change of tune on recruitment and retention

Angela Gismondi March 22, 2019



ANGELA GISMONDI — Dr. Jon Callegher discussed the results of the report *Retaining Employees in the Skilled Trades* at an event in Toronto March 19. Job Talks, a firm specializing in work-related research, conducted the survey of 412 skilled trades workers which provides a roadmap to improve recruitment and retention of young workers. It was commissioned by the Residential Construction Council of Ontario, with support from the Ontario government.

A new report on how to improve recruitment and retention of youth in the construction industry in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) shows there is a high level of job satisfaction among workers, but significant challenges still remain.

“We need to leverage the industry’s massive network for recruitment,” said Dr. Jon Callegher, author of the report, adding this is one of the recommendations.

“Retention begins with recruiting the right workers. I know I’m preaching to the choir today, but it’s time for the choir to start singing and the song needs to change. The song was good money, earn a great living. If that was working we wouldn’t need a different song. You have work-life balance, you know the contribution you are making to society, you are less stressed and anxious about the future because you have job security, you work with great people: that is the message we can articulate by pooling our resources in the industry.”

[The report](#), Retaining Employees in Skilled Trades, was commissioned by **the Residential Construction Council of Ontario**, with support from the Ontario government. Job Talks, a firm specializing in work-related research, conducted an online survey of 412 skilled trades workers. The findings were revealed at an event in Toronto March 19.

Callegher introduced [Jobtalksconstruction.ca](#), a website that introduces students, parents, teachers and counsellors to careers in the construction industry. A new video series available on the site features young people sharing their stories and experiences.

In his address, Callegher said the findings indicate despite the stigma associated with construction trades, nearly two-thirds (65 per cent) of the GTA trades rated their job satisfaction between eight and 10 on a scale of one to 10.

“If I ask the question what do you do for a living to someone who works in construction, what’s the answer? I work in construction,” said Callegher. “Is there any wonder why outside of the industry there is such a narrow view of the construction industry?”

The image that comes to mind when people think of construction is a man working in a pit full of dirt in extreme weather, Callegher noted.

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— **Dr. Jon Callegher**

Retaining Employees in Skilled Trades Report Author

“The construction trades has a marketing problem because, as we all know, the reality is beyond the pit and it encompasses so much more,” he said. “In order to expand and address this marketing problem, which has a real effect on retention, we drafted this study.”

One thing that came out of the survey is that mentoring matters.

“Eighty per cent of workers were prepared by mentors on the job,” said Callegher. “What is interesting is that 31 per cent were prepared for the trades by a family member. A family member taught them the skills they needed to succeed in their job which is really important because in terms of influencers, family and friends is the top influencer of one’s decision to get into the trades.”

The study also looked at construction workers compared to the general Canadian population.

“We can tell you that construction workers have much better jobs than the rest of Canadians,” said Callegher. “Two thirds of construction industry workers in the GTA are in the comfortable and fulfilled category versus less than half of the Canadian population.”

They also asked respondents why is there a labour shortage in the industry and why are people leaving.

“Close to 100 per cent said there is a big stigma attached to the trades,” said Callegher, adding educators, teachers and guidance counsellors often don’t promote the trades as a career option.

“Youth are encouraged to go to university or college. Parents, while they can be very influential getting someone into the trades, especially if they themselves have recognized that you can have a good life because they had a good life in the trades, it is not a majority. They want their kids to be ‘safe.’ They want them to have a better life than they did, so they tell their kids go to university, not realizing perhaps that university has changed since they were younger.”

On average the respondents said 33 per cent of workers will eventually leave their trade, however, they often leave for what can be referred to as “good reasons.”

“They leave because they get better offers and other opportunities within the trade so they are not actually leaving,” said Callegher.

“We have to remember people in the construction industry tend to, the data would suggest, look at someone who is going into management or starting their own business as leaving. That’s a good example of the stereotype of the construction worker affecting the workers themselves, because a bricklayer who goes on to start a business but still also lays brick is not looked upon as someone who is a bricklayer.”

Respondents were also asked to share their opinions to retain good workers. In terms of priorities they listed increasing rate of pay, providing incentives for helping to train new people, providing more opportunities for advancement and opportunities to gain additional training.

The findings of a second study entitled, A Behavioural Economics Approach to Recruitment in Skilled Construction Trades, by Jason Stewart and Lindsay McCardle, were also discussed at the event. The Daily Commercial News will have more on that study in a future article.