

The value of continuing education

To be successful in residential construction, you need skilled hands on the tools, that's the main reason people hire a builder with knowledge and experience.

But know-how is not the only reason a builder gets hired.

To be successful, your construction firm needs the same strong skills as any other thriving business. A good recipe for initial and continuing success is knowing where your strengths are and being aware of your weaknesses. Real success often comes after you find a way to improve on weaknesses.

That does not mean becoming a 'Jack or Jill of all trades and master of none'. In other words, if you are a hands-on builder, you don't have to become a financial planner or a marketing guru. Conversely, if your strength is numbers and financial management, you don't have to become a lead carpenter or a project manager. You do, however, need to understand enough about those areas to:

- Hire a competent team
- Have productive discussions about their areas of expertise
- Know when there's a problem

When you look at builders who have one- and two-year waiting lists of clients, you'll find that the whole team has strong skills in many complementary areas.

Ask a room full of seasoned builders how they get qualified leads, and most of them will point to customer referrals. Who's your best brand ambassador? Your satisfied client. Who has most contact with your client, and the best opportunities to wow them with your team's competence and understanding of quality home building? If it's your site crew, they need good customer service skills to get those referrals happening. If it's your sales team, they need to know why your clients should care about the house-as-a-system and how that knowledge plays into closing more deals.

Ask the same room full of seasoned builders what their biggest source of call-backs is, and half of them will point to human error. People make mistakes when they don't have adequate training, when they don't follow established procedures, and when they're in a hurry. Call-backs cost you money, there's no two ways about it.

Here are some ways that builders are using training to improve their bottom line:

- One firm is putting their whole team through technical, sales, customer relations, and project management, with the goal of reducing their warranty call-backs by 70 percent over the next two years

- A builder is putting everyone on his site crew through customer service training, so they can act as his best sales ambassadors
- A realtor is putting their sales staff through construction technology so that they can talk high-performance housing with clients

Continuing education opportunities are often a challenge to justify in terms of immediate return on investment. Is the training targeted to the construction industry needs? Does it justify taking people out of the office or off the tools for days or weeks?

Tarion has instigated an educational competency requirement for new registrants to help minimize warranty claims and call-backs. While these courses are requirements for new registrants, existing Tarion registrants can take advantage of the continuing education opportunities for their staff and crews to brush up on skillsets in these seven key areas:

Business Planning and Management
Financial Planning and Management
Project Management and Supervision
Legal Issues in Housing
Building Codes in Ontario
Construction Technology
Customer Service and Tarion Requirements

For more information regarding the continuing education requirements, please visit our [Getting Registered](#) page and [TrainingOntario](#)'s website.

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