

DON'T SEND YOUR KIDS TO COLLEGE!

Good, I have your attention!

Where is the next generation carpenter going to come from?

Bricklayers, tile installers, plasterers?

Builders and remodelers across America respond similarly to the question "what is the #1 concern in this field" and the answer for years is the "lack of work force". We have been in the remodeling business for 37 years. Currently we have 8 carpenters and apprentices on the job every day. We would like to expand but the dwindling work force hampers that decision. Now the aging of baby boomers more than ever threatens to deplete much of that workforce.

While we're training so many our youth to get college degrees, the cost of remodeling our homes will continue to increase because of the lack of skilled trades people. This will eventually be a great concern - one nearly every homeowner will face. While builders have maxed out their budgets providing the large homes customers drool over -quality is often sacrificed. Buyers choose expansive entrance halls with cathedral ceilings instead of wisely spending more of their dollars on quality cabinets, tubs, faucets, doors and windows. We once remodeled homes after they were 15-20 years old; now it's just 5-8 years. The demand is increasing but the workforce is decreasing.

Turning an old, ugly kitchen or those block basement walls into a beautiful and efficient area of the home is so satisfying. Everyday is different. Yes, sometimes it's physically tough work. Certainly it's mentally challenging. Obstacles are sometimes hidden behind walls; we must make the home appear straight and plumb, even when it isn't. Remodeling requires last minute adaptations - problem solving; even more gratifying when the challenge is great. The youth we hire gain skills that will be useful the rest of their lives. We offer them fascinating and specialized careers - immune to outsourcing! They find pride and gratification in tearing out and transforming that kitchen rather than adding columns of figures, running the same lab test or working on a keyboard every day.

Our kids are not the problem - educators and parents are the major obstacles in this predicament. Schools define success as "percentage of college ready". We're failing our students. It's a prejudiced system because it implies those in our field are not smart, uneducated and that it's a dirty career. Perhaps our own industry needs to change our thinking. After all, secretaries are now administrative assistants; sales people are account managers. Job descriptions should be associate carpenter or residential construction technician - certainly not laborers or helpers.

There are so many opportunities and needs. There are many young men and women who would be a good fit for the "trades". Let's encourage them in a direction that might set them up for wonderful and gratifying careers. Let them know that "career and technical education" is not anything to be ashamed of. We recently sent a young fellow to ceramic tile school - there are so many options. We recognize that additional schooling of any type is always helpful and do encourage business and self improvement classes. Not everyone learns the same way; some learn

with their hands. Don't be blind to other skills or abilities. We don't want to leave these kids behind.

Give our kids a chance in life. Allow them to use their true skills and abilities while building tremendous self esteem. The opportunities are endless in these lucrative, intellectually challenging and super gratifying jobs. Sue Clark Clark Construction Company

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