

I have a great deal of gratitude for my organization the International Union of Painter's & Allied Trades, for the small business owners also known as subcontractors who employed me, for my instructors and journey workers that supported and trained me to become a skilled craftsman, and to my mentors that challenged me and took the time to help me develop. What do all the above have in common? The workforce model of a Registered Apprenticeship Program which has a rich history in the US and a bright future. Like many others before me this system provided me an opportunity, a purpose, and the tools to achieve success.

An apprenticeship in the skilled trades offers a unique opportunity to gain hands-on experience while earning a living. Unlike traditional classroom education, "earn while you learn" apprenticeships allow you to gain knowledge by working under the guidance of experienced professionals in the industry. Practical training ensures that you develop the technical skills necessary to excel in your chosen field, whether it's plumbing, electrical work, or the finishing trades. This leads to full-time employment, providing a clear path to a stable career without the burden of student loan debt. The other 4-year degree is what we commonly reference a registered apprenticeship program although the time frame depending on craft and curriculum can be anywhere from 3-5 years.

Beyond the technical skills, apprenticeships also foster personal development. They teach you how to work in real-world environments, solve problems on the spot, and communicate effectively on jobsites and beyond. These skills are invaluable across many areas of life and make apprentices highly sought after by employers. Furthermore, the demand for skilled tradespeople continues to grow, offering long-term job security and competitive wages. With an abundance of Mega projects on the horizon combined with a workforce that is aging there is an urgency to get new candidates in the pipeline to sustain the industry for those small business owners long term. An apprenticeship not only builds expertise but sets the foundation for a rewarding and sustainable career.

In apprenticeship school our instructors teach hands-on applications & best practices. There is a large component dedicated to health & safety to minimize accidents in the field. There are conversations around tools, equipment and technologies in the craft. Training around financial literacy, social skills, the history of the trade and advances in the industry are incorporated. We complete mockups in house for repetition in the craft and perform projects for nonprofits in the community. After apprenticeship school there is a focus on journeyworker upgrading as we have an obligation to maintain our reputation as the most highly skilled, safe and productive workforce performing our crafts. We have an online Learning Management System with hundreds of courses to choose from including blueprint reading, estimating essentials and project management. This helps w/ the retention of our workforce and the constant training makes those involved more employable. The way we have our apprenticeship setup is called block training which is 4 full weeks a year during the months of January through April. Some programs have night school where students come in after work hours. In areas where a Local or District Council like ours are spread out the block training is better suited. The rest of the apprenticeship is made up of OJT with our contractor partners.

A high paying and sustainable career with benefits in the construction field is the purpose of a registered apprenticeship program. With continued education & training

opportunities additional pathways can be accessed in the industry. Some of the best Foreman, Superintendents, Project Managers, Contractors, Safety Officers, Business Representatives, Instructors, Engineers were developed through field experience & an apprenticeship. I completed my apprenticeship in 2016, which is worth 40 college credits through an articulation agreement we have with Mountwest Community & Technical College, and then finished my associate's degree. I was running projects in the field and started instructing part time through our District Council which eventually led to a full-time staff position in August of 2018. Now one of the best parts of my career is seeing others come in and find similar success and watching their trajectory in life change. An apprenticeship program is a great way to start a career as well as a necessary system to continue the pipeline of skilled journey workers to business owners. Any opportunities that we have to increase apprenticeships will assist the challenges surrounding supply and demand that dominate recent conversation in the industry while simultaneously raising up those middle-class workers.