

Good morning, everybody. Dennis Engelbrecht with The Family Business Institute where *We Build Better Contractors*.

Today's session of digging deeper is number seven in our series of the top 10 factors for construction company success that I've witnessed over my time in the industry. So, lesson seven today, Honor the Field. I have it as lesson seven, but actually it was probably my first lesson in construction. I think my first client going back some 22 years in time, my first construction client had a one-page sheet of paper and on it were the keys to construction success. And I'll never forget number one on that list was *Honor the Field*. And I think that lesson is still valuable today because the field out there on the construction site, that's where the rubber meets the road. We can estimate cost duration, we can promise quality, we can promise safety, but the fact of the matter is it's the folks out there in the field that are going to produce it.

And for us as leaders, we want to make sure that they get their due. And it's probably very consistent in construction that there is some divide between the office and the field. And to a certain extent, we can't help it because our company leaders are in the office and people see them every day, the folks in the office, but the folks in the field don't see them every day. So there is just a natural geographic divide between the field and the office. So how do we bridge that? How do you as leaders do that, honor the field and make sure that that connection is solid between the office and the field? Well, every time we do a round table and people have their takeaways, probably at least 50% of the people say, "I got to get out to the field more." So, what we do is we let all these day-to-day urgencies and priorities take over that desire.

And too often we just don't get there. We just don't get out to the field enough as leaders and we've got to do it. And not only is it getting out there, it's how you get out there to make sure that you're shaking hands, you're engaging with people, you're thanking people for what they do when you're out there. And it's not just a fly by, to actually look people in the eye, thanking them, asking about their family. All of those things, engaging those folks, it creates a culture, it creates a loyalty, it gets you everything you want and need from that field. Along with that, feeding and clothing. This may sound funny, but every once in a while, buying lunch for the field, sending out for pizzas. As effective as anything I have ever seen is when the company leaders, or at least the project leaders, bring out the grill and they smoke a pig or whatever, but they feed the people on the construction site.

Again, that just shows a little bit of extra care. And I talked about clothing, you've got company clothing, you've got people in the office wearing the company shirt, the company logo, outfit your people in the field. So many things come from this. Number one, they feel cared for. Number two, it becomes more of a team event. We're all dressed with this. We're all dressed nicely. That's another thing that puts off a good image. But make sure your folks get that and don't sell it to them. Give it to them. How much can it possibly cost compared to the rest of things? Feed and clothe your people in the field. Company get together, this is a difficult one because we have different cultures out there in the field sometimes. I know in the company I ran; we had a large Hispanic population. We also have females and males.

And I think in the construction world, sometimes all we can think about is hunting and fishing. We get people together; we reward people with hunting and fishing. Well, that might not be right for everybody. So, there's a place for the hunting and fishing and those things as well. But how you structure your company get together and make sure they're inclusive, particularly of the field people. And remember the field people are working all over a region and getting there is not easy. So we have that as well. But certainly, what I hear more often than not, the company picnics where the families are invited and people get to associate as families, those seem to be the most effective things, the things held during the day and on weekends.

And again, with lots of prizes and lots of hoopla, it's nice to do other things, but anything you can do that number one, don't forget your ethnicities. If half of your group is of another ethnicity, why not have some games or some themes around that as well. On the other hand, what doesn't do so well sometimes is the dinner at the country club where folks don't feel comfortable. And again, there's a place for those and nothing necessarily wrong with those, but if you're relying

on that for inclusion or for honoring the field, it's probably not getting it done, because that's not their environment. Next thing I want to talk about in honoring the field is tools and equipment. If you let your tools get old and shotty or you're not using the right equipment for the job, you're using equipment that doesn't work half the time or things like that, those are going to be a downer for your team. If you believe in your people and you want to see your people do well and feel good, make sure they have good and the right tools and equipment for their job.

Things that are in good working order, new is great. Obviously not everything's going to be new all the time because as soon as it's new, it becomes old. But make sure you have the right amount of new stuff; you're replenishing it and all of that and everybody's going to walk with a lot more pride and do a better job for you. It's really just that simple. And don't forget about safety. Having the right tool for the job helps people stay safe as well. And then there's having your tools and equipment and supplies in the right time in the place, your logistics. Your logistics are very important. If you got people out there in the field that are frustrated because they're making progress and now, they can't go forward because they're missing something, that brings them down. It's up to you as leaders and the management down the line to make sure you have the right equipment, the right tools there at the right time, the right place.

Commitment to safety, I just mentioned it, but your commitment to safety can't be about your EMR. It can't be about the various rates you get judged on. It has to be about employee wellbeing and that has to be demonstrated. If it's about dollars and numbers, that again is not honoring the field. Honoring the field is sending them home with their five fingers or their 10 fingers, their 10 toes every night, healthy and well, back to their families and that's taking care of people. So make sure you do have a safety focus, but that safety focus is focused on your people's wellbeing. Having their backs. Nothing more frustrating than the folks in the field going down a direction, somebody complaining, and then senior leaders coming in and saying, "You idiot," and changing everything around even if it was a good plan and something happened.

So, it's important to have your people's backs and that gets demonstrated all ways. Another thing in honoring the field is don't make them second class citizens. I have seen way too many companies that have a policy and procedure manual that treats the field people worse. They get less time off; they don't get the same benefits or the same insurance plan or other things. This is where it happens, folks. Make sure your people are treated well. Make sure they get the rest they need. Make sure if they have to go see a doctor, that that's allowable and the culture and everything else. So, make sure that you don't treat your field people like second class citizens, or you know what, they'll probably treat you like second class owners. Just saying. Awards and recognition. Again, they're as far from the C-suite as they can get, but they're the ones doing the work and they want and need recognition and awards and all of those things as well.

And by the way, there's a lot more of them than there are of you. So that means you need more awards and more recognition than you need up at the top of the chain of command. But that's quite important and there's a lot of pride. And when you see those awards given oftentimes in front of their folks they're working with, their teammates and comrades and all of that, that has such an effect. You just see their faces just blow up in joy and pride and that's fantastic. So, one last lesson in honoring the field. You got to have owners and leaders at all levels who truly care about the people, the families, their wellbeing. And when I say at all levels, if you got folks down there at that foreman level or superintendent level, these mid-management levels that are treating them like dirt, you can care all you want. It's not going to translate. You have to have your managers and leaders at all levels who truly care and care about those people, those families, and their wellbeing. And that's honoring the field.

Dennis Engelbrecht, digging deeper.