

Tony Fanelli:

We are going through some very troubled times. In the construction industry, especially in the type of work that we do, as an employer, things are a whole lot different than they were six or eight months ago. If you were to ask me six months ago where to find tradespeople, I would have a difficult time trying to seek them out, especially in Canada or the United States.

But the picture has changed. In the oil and gas industry, things have gotten very different in the last six or 8 months. Currently, we have the last remaining mega-project that is going on in Alberta, the Shell Scotford project. Today, I want to outline for you what we have in place there with respect to apprenticeship, how we see apprenticeship and how important it is to us as an organization.

Our mission statement, with respect to apprenticeship is as follows: We at Bantrel are committed to creating an environment in which experienced journeypersons coach and enable new workers in the industry to become safe, skilled, competent, productive journeypersons.

Through the years in Alberta, with the amount of work that we've had, we have had lots of challenges in attracting and bringing in young people to the trades. In working with local unions, because we are a unionized contractor, we were able to establish a mentoring system and put it in place in most of our projects. We have instituted that as part of our ongoing program as it relates to apprenticeship. It starts with our upper management's commitment to the program.

This program has 3 main parts. Because we are so closely aligned with our clients, because we work for the people who ultimately pay the bills, we talk to them about how important apprenticeship is. In doing so, we have also committed them to saying we need at least 20% of our workforce to be apprentices. We have convinced our owners that that is the way we need to go going forward, with respect to apprenticeship.

The second part involves working with local unions to ensure that they can supply us with the people to fill the large number of jobs when we get involved in major projects.

We have experienced serious challenges in Alberta in the last ten or twelve years. We have had lots of good work over a significant period of time to bring in young people and get them interested, but what we have found was that there was no system or process for people to learn. To address that situation, we founded our mentoring program. This program incorporates the local unions, our supervision at the field level, and ultimately, the apprentice.

When we enroll apprentices, we try to congregate them in first and second year and in third and fourth year, but primarily the focus is on this first group: the first and second year apprentices. We have them work with our onsite foremen and with our journeypersons. We orient them at the front end, where our journeypersons are very much involved in that front-end orientation. We explain to these young people how we will work with them during their period of involvement with our project. We set up folders for each of the apprentices that come on board. With our sponsored mentor, who is onsite and looks after the entire mentoring program, works directly with our foremen and

our apprentices and moves those apprentices from one crew to another, setting up curriculums based on the apprenticeship program for that province and that becomes the base of knowledge that they have to work to. From there we build on what is required in an industrial environment.

So we get the support of the local unions. We get the support of supervision. We get the involvement of the foremen and the superintendents on these projects, which makes it their program. Once they are involved, they want to see it to the end to make sure that these apprentices are learning from the time that they enter the project right through until hopefully, if the project is long enough, until they finish.

With that, the apprentice is committed to the program, our supervision is committed to the program and they learn every facet of their trade. We cover all trades. Currently at Scotford, we have upwards of 300 apprentices on our project in first and second year, covering all trades: Carpenters, Operating Engineers, Pipefitters, Electricians, across all craft lines. We are then able to place these people on a grid and monitor their progress as they move through their apprenticeship on a project.

What we've seen in doing all of this is a level of commitment that we had never really understood before in our industry. Historically, what have we done. Well, coming through the industry, an apprentice comes in, he gets hired on, he gets assigned to a journeyman, the journeyman sits and there was no set curriculum or program for the apprentice to learn other than to watch the journeyman and maybe, if the journeyman is committed, he'll move that person through the system. This really formalizes that person's learning and we have found huge benefits coming out of this program. We are now convinced that this is what we need to do on all of our projects.

With the downturn in the economy, in our industry, it goes up and down. We have issues when there is no work. What we're trying to do is maintain this 20% when we do have major projects, and even now we're looking at smaller projects that we're bidding. If we can institute a similar type program, maybe not to the robust state that we have on the mega projects, but we need to continue the program on smaller projects because for us, it's our life blood. We need to make sure that we have an ongoing flow of new talent coming through our trades. That's basically the program. I can certainly answer any questions you may have on our program. But I can tell you that the overall effect has been very positive. There's been a higher level of commitment than we've seen on our projects and on others, where there has been the traditional sort of hire and fire. Historically, when there is a downturn, our apprentices are the first to go. With this program, there is a commitment with the owner and the local unions that the apprentices will stay throughout the course of the project. This is something that we need as an industry to institute with our local unions, and with our owners; it is an important part of our industry that needs to be maintained. So we are very committed to this and we think it is something to get us through the downturn and get us prepared for when this thing turns around.