

Good enough for your daughter? Good enough for the jobsite.

BY MARK BRESLIN
Special Contributor

YOUR LOVELY LITTLE girl. The apple of your eye. Imagine that your daughter, who has you wrapped around her little finger, has just come home and announced her engagement to a guy that you've never met. You're less than thrilled.

What's the first question you ask her? "Is he nice?" "What kind of family does he come from?" "Do you really love him?" No. You're going to ask her, "So what does this guy do for a living?" And she dreamily replies, "He's a Teamster."

Now, being a construction guy, you're feeling a little conflicted. You always hoped that your daughter would marry a doctor or perhaps a lawyer, but a Teamster? You're not so sure. She tells you he's going to drop by to take her out to lunch this very day. And precisely at that moment, the doorbell rings. You walk to the door, take a breath and open it. And find yourself staring into the face of a handsome young man. A Teamster. In his sharp UPS brown uniform.

What do you think about her choice now?

The reality is that appearance has a huge impact on how we perceive construction employees – and how

customers perceive you. It is time for the union construction industry across the United States and Canada to adopt mandatory uniform and dress code policies for all craftspeople.

If a company or organization seeks to build an image and a brand, it has to think about the appearance of its employees. There can be no disconnect between the two. High-value brands and organizations do not compromise on this issue. But the union construction industry does, and it hurts us badly.

At a recent presentation to the International Union of Heat and Frost Insulators, I threw down this same challenge. At the end of the speech, the union's General President Jim Grogan (not a man to let grass grow under his feet) got on the microphone and held a floor vote with the delegates on requiring every apprentice in the nation to wear a uniform. Last week I saw what they have in mind. It's awesome: Carhartt light-brown pants combined with a dark green long-sleeved shirt, with the union's logo and "Energy



Conservation Specialist" above the heart (see photo). Other unions have made changes too: the UA in Chicago have their apprentices wear sharp blue short-sleeved shirts displaying their affiliation, and the UBC in St. Louis requires every member to wear white overalls. Some companies – especially those working in service areas or high public-contact jobs – also issue shirts bearing their corporate logos. But all of these are exceptions to the rule.

Last year I spoke to tens of thousands of union apprentices. I saw thousands of hats on backward or sideways. Hoodies pulled over heads indoors. Neck tattoos. Bandanas and bling. Ripped jackets and pants. Profane or filthy shirts. The percentage of guys I would describe as "squared away"

It is time for the union construction industry across the United States and Canada to adopt mandatory uniform and dress code policies for all craftspeople.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 16

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 15

would be around 35 percent. These are young people representing our industry and our competitive value proposition. It's time to add professional appearance as a MANDATORY part of our industry approach.

Here are the three suggestions I have for transforming our industry into a more professional, respected and attractive destination for clients and talent:

- Every apprentice in the United States and Canada should be required to wear a uniform. It brands the union as professional. Also, in this way the apprentices self-identify as professionals, just like cops, firemen, paramedics and members of the military. They look cool and know it.
- Every journeyman has to meet uniform appearance standards. This is not for their benefit, but for our clients'. Our image and brand need to match our price. The secret is, the workers themselves will eventually find that they feel better about their jobs and careers when people see them as pros in action.
- Every contractor needs to pick up where the unions leave off. Contractors communicate their professional expect-

The percentage of guys I would describe as "squared away" would be around 35 percent ... It's time to add professional appearance as a MANDATORY part of our industry approach.

tations to every person in a company by the way they allow people to present themselves. A casual industry is fine as long as it does not breed casual behaviors. In many cases, ours does.

When I worked in the field, I admit I liked getting dirty. I liked being a guy who took a shower after work rather than before. I have tattoos and wore what I wanted. But we need to start thinking about differentiating ourselves from the competition and how we will represent ourselves as we seek new talent. We need to transform the self-identification of a "blue collar worker" into that of a knowledge-based professional craftsman. And we need to do all of this yesterday.

Remember your daughter's imaginary fiancée? What if he showed up dirty and scroungy as a member of any trade in our industry? Yes, many of us have those same roots, but don't tell me you wouldn't rather see that

brown uniform. It represents something positive, and everybody knows and responds to it. It's our turn now. ■

Mark Breslin is a strategist and author who focuses on improving organizational performance, leadership and work ethic. Known for his blunt and uncompromising style, he has addressed more than 500 audiences and well over 200,000 leaders, managers and craft workers. He is the author of Survival of the Fittest, Million Dollar Blue Collar, and Alpha Dog: Leading, Managing & Motivating in the Construction Industry. Read more about him at www.breslin.biz.



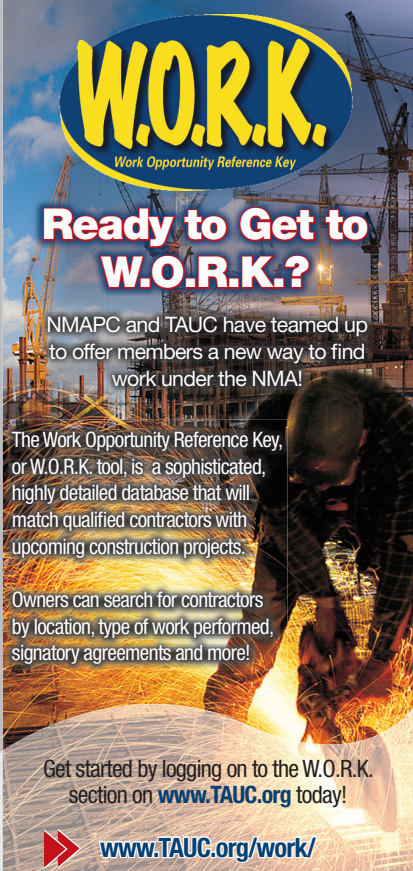

THE AMERICAN GROUP OF CONSTRUCTORS

Prime & General Contracting Services

Piping Group	Crane Repair Group
Civil Group	Boilermaker Group
Concrete Specialties Group	Mechanical/Structural Group
Stud Welding Services Group	Commercial Group

Industrial & Commercial Maintenance • Repair • Construction
ASME • ICRI • CRSI • TAUC (Governing Member)

Phone 877-937-1508
www.tagconstructors.com



W.O.R.K.
Work Opportunity Reference Key

Ready to Get to W.O.R.K.?

NMAPC and TAUC have teamed up to offer members a new way to find work under the NMA!

The Work Opportunity Reference Key, or W.O.R.K. tool, is a sophisticated, highly detailed database that will match qualified contractors with upcoming construction projects.

Owners can search for contractors by location, type of work performed, signatory agreements and more!

Get started by logging on to the W.O.R.K. section on www.TAUC.org today!

www.TAUC.org/work/