



# Construction’s Career Crisis: How Did We Get Here?

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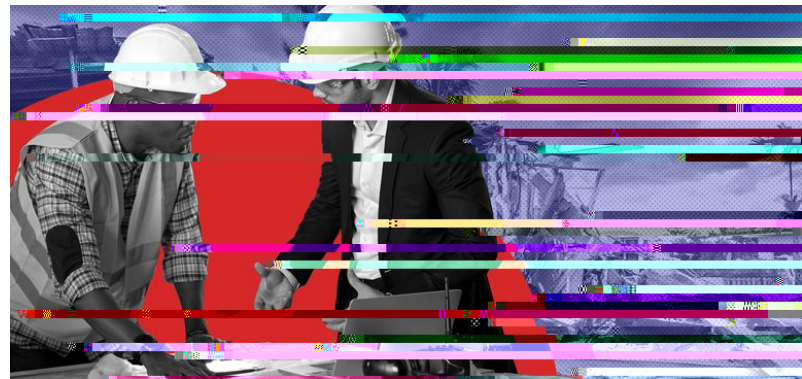
## EXPERTS WEIGH IN ON THE FACTORS THAT MADE CONSTRUCTION A PROFESSION FOR “SOMEONE ELSE’S KID,” AND THE LONG ROAD AHEAD TO FIX IT.

A four-decade veteran of the construction industry, Greg Sizemore says he doesn’t remember a time when there wasn’t a “Help Wanted” sign on most jobsites.

When Sizemore — now the vice president of health, safety, environment and workforce development at Associated Builders and Contractors — started out as a laborer, he thought construction would just be a summer job. He recalls contractors looking for skilled and unskilled workers. Fast forward to today and the problem has only increased.

The issue is widespread: 92% of contractors have reported said they have turned down work because of it, according to the most recent U.S. Chamber of Commerce Commercial Construction Index.

Here, Construction Dive takes a look at the historical factors leading to the crisis and the issues, both internal and external to the industry, that have led to the challenge to staff the country’s jobsites.



decades, but, like so much else, has also been worsened by the pandemic.

The number of construction workers in the U.S. hit an all-time high at 7.7 million workers in April 2006, until the Great Recession caused the number of workers to plummet. 2011 marked the low point of construction employment, with 2.1 million fewer workers than April 2006, according to Ken Simonson, chief economist for Associated General Contractors of America.

Beginning with 2011, however, employment numbers began steadily increasing. Total nonfarm payroll employment set

Simonson said, until March of that year. The number of workers, seasonally adjusted, dropped from 7.6 million in February 2020

start of the pandemic, according to data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

## The numbers

The construction careers crisis is one that has worsened for



That combined with construction failing to demonstrate that it is a path to the American middle class, Basu said, has made it a hard selling point.

Other groups pour time, effort, and money into recruitment services to show trade schools are a real option for high schoolers, but, Sizemore said, if they're not in the right ZIP code

group, it's simply harder to get to those students and encourage them to take a chance on the trades.

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## Retention troubles

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Some potential employees never even give construction work a real shot.

"I've heard (AGC) members say that, 'We have to hire two

bounce out by the end of the week,'" Turmail said.

But where do those workers go? Turmail jested that they may turn to Starbucks, where the initial pay can be comparable, but they don't have the long-term career opportunities that they'd

manufacturing often choose positions in those industries, he said.

That happened during the Great Recession as well, Basu said, as many workers left construction when there was an oil and natural gas boom, after a brief labor surplus of brought on by



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## About the Author

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