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Working to assist members with diversity and inclusion - by Kyle Reagan

July 23, 2021 - Construction Design & Engineering



Kyle Reagan

A recent ABC webinar highlighted diversity and inclusion, an increasingly high-profile issue that is particularly important in a booming construction industry that faces a labor shortage. The webinar shared resources and insights from our Diversity and Inclusion Task Force, which launched last year and is chaired by Luiza Mills of Interstate Electrical Services Corp.

Allison Jackson of our staff introduced participants to the Tableau Map of Resources, a portal that connects users from across Massachusetts with diversity and inclusion resources in their area. Members can link to Tableau from the ABC website.

Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission director Bill Allen talked powerfully about how working with MRC to find employees isn't just the right thing to do, it also makes business sense. He said his job is to find you "the most qualified candidate you can get," not just the most qualified person with a disability. He noted that he works with individuals with a wide range of skill sets – including defense missile engineers – and that his organization can provide customized training.

"If I do my job right," Allen said, "you'll never know the person you hire has a disability."

ABC has first-hand knowledge of Mass Rehab. Allen noted that one of his clients spoke movingly at a State House event about how working for ABC changed her life.

ABC director of workforce development Steve Sullivan said companies need to think differently about hiring. He urged them to turn to other resources such as community-based organizations and vocational-technical schools to find qualified candidates.

He also urged members to seek out graduates of the PACMAN pre-apprenticeship program that ABC is operating thanks to a state grant. Fifteen graduates of the first cohort from five continents have been placed in the industry, and there are two more cohorts to come.

ABC board member John Cruz, president and CEO of the Cruz Companies, said "We need women and minorities to sustain the growth of our industry. Fellow board member Karl Hudson agreed, citing the "alarming rate of retirements" at his company, L.C. Anderson. Hudson also urged members to meet with public officials and urge them to make it easier to hire by streamlining burdensome licensing processes.

Construction has a good story to tell talented young people. Finding the audience to tell that story about lucrative and rewarding careers requires a different approach than many of us have previously taken, but adapting to a changing world can yield a strong and committed workforce that can enrich both our companies and the wider construction industry.

Kyle Reagan is 2021 ABC MA chairman and is the CEO of DECCO Inc.