

VINYL SIDING INDUSTRY LOOKS TO TAKE LEAD ROLE IN WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Don Browne

April 28, 2020 (<https://www.vinylsiding.org/blog/vinyl-siding-industry-looks-to-take-lead-role-in-workforce-development/>)

WORKING TO DRIVE MORE PEOPLE TO THE TRADES

EDITOR'S NOTE: While the COVID-19 crisis has impacted our lives in so many ways, the home-building and construction industries will survive (currently, the construction industry has been deemed as "essential" in 80 percent of the states) and no doubt will thrive in better days. Now may be an optimal time to pursue career development opportunities in the trades.

An estimated 3 million homes are sided each year, and vinyl siding is the most common exterior used, found on more new homes being built annually. And with an estimated 800,000+ jobs projected to be added to the construction industry by 2024, the vinyl siding industry has positioned itself quite nicely to be a leader in workforce development.

Here is what the Vinyl Siding Institute (VSI) is doing in cooperation with its members and industry partners to match career development opportunities with the multitudes of people seeking real growth in a profession (<https://www.vinylsiding.org/work-in-vinyl-siding/>) that offers security, stability, fun, daily challenges, greater accessibility and endless possibilities.

MORE THAN ANY OTHER TRADE, GETTING STARTED IS EASY

It seems like every construction tradesperson has their war stories about their first few months on the job, including the verbal abuse from the old salts for their lack of knowledge or experience. When it comes to installing vinyl siding, it's all about speed and precision – you can side a lot of homes and buildings faster than any other cladding, so contractors and their teams are motivated to help new workers earn their sea legs sooner.

Whether you're a young adult (<https://www.vinylsiding.org/workforce-young-adult/>), military veteran (<https://www.vinylsiding.org/workforce-veteran/>), or going through a career transition (<https://www.vinylsiding.org/workforce-career-transition/>), you owe it to yourself to take a look at the vinyl siding industry. Entry-level positions start at \$15 per hour, with the potential to make a solid living in the early stages of this career. You get to work with your hands in a job that keeps you busy, and you're building something real, that can't be faked on a resume. There is the daily challenge of new projects with chances to learn and grow your career with every new hour that you work. (<https://www.vinylsiding.org/blog/every-installation-is-an-opportunity-to-grow/>) Polymeric siding is one of the easiest materials to install, creating easy entry for anyone interested in pursuing a trade – regardless of prior construction experience.

According to Coach Rob Balfanz, VSI's Director of Workforce Development, there is a fourth category of potential vinyl siding installers: skilled tradesmen and women in transition.

"There is an abundance of window and door installers, as well as roofers, who would really excel as vinyl installers with the training and workforce development tools we provide. What's more, the window and door guys often have to work from the inside and are seasonal, just like the roofers. Vinyl siding installers can work year-round (in rain or shine, even snow) and never have to go inside."

VSI's Installer Certifications

Only two years of experience are required for eligibility to become a VSI-certified installer. Online VSI-Certified Installer Accreditation Programs (<https://www.vinylsiding.org/certified-pros-and-products/become-certified-installer/>) are affordable and user-friendly, with minimal requirements to qualify. (Note: Special discounts are being offered now until the end of May for both new installer and renewal certification courses to help those whose jobs have been impacted by the COVID-19 outbreak).

Having the VSI-Certified Installer Certification gives you higher credibility as a professional, greater trust from your customers and most importantly, the skills and knowledge to perform higher quality work. The certification also gives you greater exposure, including the use of the VSI-Certified Installer logo and supporting marketing materials.

A Wealth of Resources for Certified Installers

VSI's Certified Installer Resources page (<https://www.vinylsiding.org/certified-pros-and-products/ci-resources/>) has 42 links to a wide range of quality resources designed to help vinyl siding installers master their craft and drive new business in ways never before imagined. The Siding with Design (https://www.vinylsiding.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/VSI-Vinyl-Siding_Interactive_Designing_Style_Guide.pdf) and Siding with History (https://www.vinylsiding.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/Siding_with_History_EPS1.pdf) brochures really knock it out of the park in demonstrating vinyl's enormous design versatility, structural and performance benefits for both historic neighborhoods and projects using classic architectural styles. There are also installation videos in both English and Spanish, as well as an Installation Manual (<https://www.vinylsiding.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/2018-Vinyl-Siding-Installation-Manual-.pdf>), which is being completely overhauled and updated this year.

VSI's Workforce Development Support for Contractors

Now may be an ideal time for contractors to focus on developing their workforce teams. VSI Live (<https://www.vinylsiding.org/work-in-vinyl-siding/grow-your-workforce/>) shows contractors how to grow their workforce with training videos on recruiting and hiring, leveraging career development partners to find great employees, and how to achieve greater retention.

Their training video, "How to Recruit and Hire Employees," covers real-world issues like the lack of available installers, the lack of training expertise on internal teams, and the fact that installers are not incentivized to be effective trainers for new employees. VSI recognizes that most contractors do not have a full-time trainer on staff – members offer to use their own in-house experts to help train new employees if the contractors commit to hiring more people.

"Their territory sales reps along with many of the distributor sales reps make great trainers because of their intimate product knowledge," says Balfanz, "and they're willing to train their customers' crews because it's good for business."

The "Leverage Career Development Partners to Find Great Employees" video highlights how contractors can connect with vocational schools (both at the high school and junior college levels), career development centers, local builders associations, veterans groups and Job Corps to find people who have been well-trained (or are at least trainable to fit your team) and are ready to work. The video, "How to Retain Your Team," offers high-level tips on what contractors can do to make their employees feel more valued, with career development opportunities being a significant driver.

Additionally, the VSI has hosted highly successful training events and job fairs in different cities and will be resuming these worthwhile activities that connect contractors with potentially strong team members post-COVID-19. The VSI will also be rolling out more online training events in the coming weeks so that aspiring professionals can move forward in their career development while staying at home during the crisis. Perhaps of greatest importance, the VSI strives to continue the conversation with the three verticals of candidates mentioned above: young adult (<https://www.vinylsiding.org/workforce-young-adult/>), military veteran (<https://www.vinylsiding.org/workforce-veteran/>) or those going through a career transition (<https://www.vinylsiding.org/workforce-career-transition/>).

Veterans, for example, can leverage the leadership and technical skills they developed in the service to advance as trainers, crew leaders and even business owners. "Transitionals" can take stock in the fact that 80 percent of contractors report that they can't find the skilled workers they need; and that they can earn up to \$70,000 per year as senior installers – a career track that could be highly attainable based on prior work experience. And for the young adults, if average starting wages of \$37,000 per year are not attractive enough, consider what the number of homes and neighborhoods you help build would look like on a resume compared to peers that are still working on a four-year degree without any real-world experience. What's most attractive to the "skilled transitionals" is that the training and career development resources offered by the vinyl siding industry is light years ahead of what the other exteriors have available.

"I was a window installer and I grew up in a 'trades' family," said Balfanz, "What we are doing for career development in vinyl siding is way ahead of the curve." Another helpful resource - especially for contractors - is Coach Rob Balfanz's blog (<https://www.vinylsiding.org/advocacy/blog/>). Balfanz leverages his 20-plus years of management, logistics and trade experience to offer game-changing leadership tips that can help businesses create a culture of resilience (<https://www.vinylsiding.org/blog/the-q1-game-plan-creating-a-culture-of-resilience/>).

In these uncertain times, what we do know for sure is that the online tools are there, and many young adults, "transitionals" and veterans now have the time to consider a career in vinyl siding, with contractors making the pivots to eventually put you to work. As we know from history, the first thing we Americans do in response to a crisis is to get people to build amazing things. During the Great Depression, it was parks, forests and dams. This time, the vinyl siding industry will help lead the way.

Don Browne is a writer, entrepreneur and local legislator who believes that the power of words can change the world. He provides unique writing services for clients in the construction, health care, IT and hospitality sectors. He has a passion for small business and start-ups, as well as writing about Irish history, family and corporate biographies. As a homeowner and father of four who is passionate about community development, Don looks forward to writing more about the exciting possibilities of creating traditional neighborhoods and more sustainable communities using modern materials.

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Maintenance — The Carefree Choice

Vinyl siding has continually innovated to virtually eliminate the hassles of ongoing maintenance.

Read More (<https://www.vinylsiding.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Maintenance-The-Carefree-Choice.jpg>)

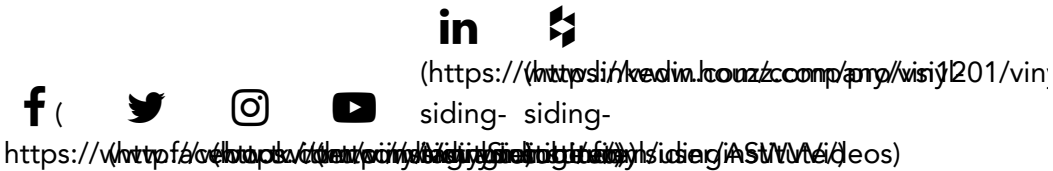


(<http://www.twitter.com/VinylSidingInfo>)

@VinylSidingInfo: Apr 29

NEW: VSI Works to Attract More People to the Trades. In his blog, writer Don Browne shares what VSI has been doing... <https://t.co/9JirNSXe3V>

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