

Circulated to key industry decision makers, *inPAINT* is a trade magazine addressing the challenges professionals face on the job at all levels, and offers solutions on subjects from business operations and marketing to product application and equipment usage. Jack Miller was asked to contribute to the 'Ask a Pro' column in their Sept/Oct 2020 issue.

ASK A PRO



Courtesy of Kenzie Fields for Jack Miller Contractors, November 2019

Q: What out-of-the box resources are you tapping to build your company?



JACK MILLER learned the building trade from his father, a builder and remodeler in northeast Ohio. Inspired to choose a life in the trades, he studied business at Ashland University, spent a few years in the steel industry, and was a campus minister for 10 years where he learned the constructive skill of mentoring. His company, Jack Miller Contractors, specializes in traditional craftsmanship and applied building science. JackMillerContractors.com

A: The foundational operating principle of our company is to promote human dignity and respect for the individual. Continued education and investing in our employees aligns with this principle. Some of the best learning opportunities have come not from traditional hands-on training, but through a blend of old and new approaches. It's an ongoing creative exercise to both identify and fund these efforts, but the rewards make it worthwhile.

For example, we participate in several peer groups that have put some really great opportunities in front of us for lean process and improvement. Our office manager joined the Employers Association of the NorthEast, a group that provides information for small businesses including a human resource hotline, info sessions on new laws, and training resources for employees. These folks suggested we apply for a training grant and helped us figure out how to navigate the application. When we realized we had \$15K available to us in a workforce training fund program, we were thrilled. We are using that funding to support several opportunities including leadership classes, lean-process training, and building professional/technical and soft skills.

Although the grant we received is Massachusetts-funded, there are many organizations in other states that offer support to entrepreneurs. The Small Business Administration, for example, works to provide grants to small businesses and also offers free business counseling to its members.

Access to the Paycheck Protection Program, designed to provide a direct incentive for small businesses to keep workers on the payroll as a result of the pandemic, allowed us to redirect our payroll funds to offer several employees access to OSHA AdvanceOnline and Passive House Institute US-certified builder trainings. And, because business was initially slowed by COVID-19, those employees actually had the time to participate in the training.

We're big fans of networking programs to provide mentorship. Our general manager participates in the Northeast Sustainable Energy Association's BuildingEnergy Bottom Lines, a business development program that uses a peer-coaching model consisting of six regional peer groups of its members dedicated to sustainability in the built environment, focusing on a triple bottom line: people, planet and profits.

We also participate in the Remodelers Advantage Roundtable Programs for Business Owners and Production Managers, a world-class peer advisory service that brings together smart, motivated remodeling professionals to help one another grow.

Joining these peer networks and being an active member of larger organizations has had a catalytic effect on the growth of our company.

Internally, our management team participates in twice-weekly meetings as a point of connection and collective learning. We bring together project managers, estimators and administrators to review processes and gain some mental muscle memory. We rotate leadership of the meeting and discuss an 'improvement of the day' and 'something I have learned' that relates to our work to exchange ideas and share personal knowledge. We also offer in-house seminars on technical skill growth, and send employees to training sessions, conferences and trade shows focused on passive house building, building science, and sustainable energy.

We constantly look for ways to provide opportunities for growth for our employees. As we promote this within our company, our employees benefit as skilled professionals, we create a more enjoyable company culture, and we find we are attracting better employees. The customer experience is improved as well—our customers benefit as they connect with a professional and high-functioning team that brings a constant improvement culture to every project. We couldn't be more excited about where we are headed.