

Considering a Career in Construction?

Get the Lowdown from Those in the Industry



Kristen Hampton Casey
Hampton Plumbing

An "Average" Day

Perhaps there's no such thing as a typical day in the skilled trades. "You try to keep a schedule in the morning and it gets off by 11:00 a.m.," says Austin Haywood, a residential development sales representative for Hermes Landscaping.

Hermes is involved in everything from paver patios, irrigation, maintenance and planting greenery for both new residential construction, pre-existing and commercial. "But the changes make it exciting."

Kristen Hampton Casey agrees. Casey runs the Hampton Plumbing showroom in Kearney, Mo. Although Casey's schedule can change on a whim, she has a standard daily checklist that involves catching up with clients and assisting them with selecting fixtures, building picture portfolios, errands to the bank and post office, checking in shipments on the dock and creating new purchase orders.

Advice to Your Younger Self

Knowing what they know now, when asked what advice they would give themselves back in high school, Brian Tebbenkamp, owner and general manager of Patriot Homes, a home builder in the Northland, and Haywood both agree finding summer work is a great start.

Additionally, acknowledging what makes you happy, like being outdoors and working with your hands, won't lead you astray.

For Haywood, laying sod was a way to be outside and make some extra cash. "It was a tough job but paid a bit better than minimum wage." This developed into a passion for landscaping on a bigger scale. "I enjoy making an area more beautiful," says Haywood.

Tebbenkamp emphasizes the importance of paying attention in the classroom. "Learn as much as you can from the people trying to teach you and better you for the future." Casey agrees, noting how important it is to "capitalize on your opportunities, your passions and your networking."

Something Tebbenkamp didn't see the relevance of as a teenager was learning a second language. "I would have fought harder to become fluent in Spanish."

As far as working summer jobs, it only took one gig in an office for Tebbenkamp to realize that wasn't for him. He took on work as a framer, continuing on after graduation. "The trades just stuck with me; it was more geared towards my personality."

Tebbenkamp, Casey and Haywood all suggest current high school students dip their toes in the trades now. Basic company requirements are usually being 17 years old with a valid drivers license.

In her job, Casey often sees a need for more staff in warehouses and delivery companies within the plumbing supply industry. Haywood stresses a good attitude and a willingness to wake up at 7:00 a.m. are two major assets for employers.



Austin Haywood
Hermes Landscaping



Brian Tebbenkamp
Patriot Homes

Where to Start

Many students are likely interested in joining the skilled trades but are unsure of where to begin and what to get into. Casey recommends if you are interested in a particular career, don't be afraid to introduce yourself to store owners and other industry professionals.

Tebbenkamp encourages shadowing and research apprenticeships. He believes finding out what you don't like is also very valuable. "If it's something you're not going to enjoy, don't try to make it your career."

Employment

What qualifications do you need to become employed in the skilled trades? Little to no experience or a lack of formal skills is NOT usually a barrier to entry.

"A willingness to learn," says Casey. "We are continuously looking for someone willing to learn and grow into the trade. A good attitude goes a long way and we can help someone gain the skills to become successful in this trade if they bring that with them."

Casey notes the ability to continue your education as technology changes is also important.

Haywood agrees with this, noting landscaping is an everchanging world. "Always try to learn more information and be dependable," says Haywood. "Nobody knows everything...The industry is usually welcoming to those that want to learn."

Tebbenkamp agrees. "Being honest about your current skill set is important as well. Being able to admit 'I might not be capable of that right now but I'm willing to try' and learn is huge."

Do What You Love

"Start in a field you enjoy and the money will be there," Tebbenkamp advises. "Most people starting out do fairly well... Some of these skilled tradesmen can make \$40 to \$50 an hour."

Casey notes the amount you can make is wide ranging, but many companies also offer retirement and health benefits on top of salary.

Tebbenkamp, Casey and Haywood all agree seeing a vision come to fruition is one of the most rewarding aspects of the job.

"Seeing the finished product and turning something out that people are happy with is very rewarding," says Tebbenkamp.

Casey enjoys working with people and getting to know her customers and colleagues to make the vision come to life.

"Whether it's an outdoor kitchen or 200 trees... bringing that to reality is a special thing we get to do," says Haywood.

Want to learn more about a career in residential construction? Visit KCHomeWork.com for information on the different types of jobs, pay ranges and videos on the home-building process.