There’s No Time Like the Present to Think About Tomorrow
By Dave Koubek, Chairman, Metal Building Manufacturers Association

Things happen. Times change. We all face transitions. One that’s particularly high on my mind these days is the future workforce for the metal building industry. Who will be our future leaders? Who will be our best employees? Who will take this industry to the next level?

I admit that I have an impasioned bias toward this industry. One great thing about it is that anyone with ambition, drive and determination can learn the skills to build a great career. I work with three people who prove that. Deb started out at Chief Buildings, Grand Island, Neb., as a drafter, went into estimating, and then was promoted to a manager. Now she is a very competent business analyst. Dave started out as a welder, became a maintenance manager, then the assistant plant manager. Now he runs the entire plant. Ern began his career in drafting, moved to estimating, and is now a sales manager.

There are so many stories of successful careers like these in the metal building industry; I bet you have many of your own. But do you share these success stories with your new recruits? Have you thought lately about what you’re doing to create these types of opportunities for new people in your organization?

To plan for our future, we need to spend more time with today’s youth and help them see the immense potential this industry provides. We also need to pay more attention to the talented people already in our companies. There are so many ways to train those who will lead our industry in 2030, and the decades that follow.

At MBMA’s spring meeting last May, Dr. David DeLong, president of Smart Workforce Strategies and co-author of “The Executive Guide to High-Impact Talent Management,” brought home the point. When it comes to employees, we need to be less concerned with exit interviews and more concerned about creating “stay” interviews. We need to know what matters most to each person and see how we can create a culture that plays to their strengths. We need to teach mentoring skills to our managers so they foster growth within our ranks. As DeLong aptly stated, “Hope is not a method.” A company’s bottom line is best served when engaged and empowered employees put their minds to work on their new ideas, as well as process and product improvements by management.

I recently read an article titled “Leadership Fundamentals for Any Market Conditions” in FMI’s quarterly magazine. Its authors make a very important point: “What we find over time, and despite construction cyclicity, is that leaders who consistently optimize their firm’s approach to talent selection and development, deepen collaborative team performance, and strengthen the organization’s ability to adapt and embrace change are the ones who consistently outperform the competition and industry averages.”

One effective way MBMA member companies are helping to build future leaders is to volunteer their staff to participate in MBMA committees. There, they can learn from their peers, develop new insights and make real industry change happen. I know of folks who have served on multiple MBMA committees throughout their careers, gaining insights and ideas with each new role. MBMA members are also building strong ties with industry suppliers and other organizations, and have learned from the experiences of those around them. This effort doesn’t stop at manufacturers. General contractors and erectors need to be working to create opportunities for the next generation as well.

One example is Dylan Seyler of S&S Structures Inc., Fleetwood, Pa. Dylan grew up in this industry working in the family business, then ultimately chose it for his own career path. He admits that he did first explore other options. Recently, he made the following observation: “I think this is a great career choice because you can build a career from the bottom and go almost anywhere. I think there are a lot of those opportunities in this industry and you can make a long, satisfying career and you don’t necessarily need a college education.” He then went on to explain what motivates him: “Every day is a new opportunity for a new challenge. You’re facing a different situation every day or you’re looking at something new every day and there’s plenty of room for innovation in the industry. That gives a lot of room for career growth.”

We can all agree that change is inevitable, but that doesn’t make it a bad thing. Transitions are a necessary part of everyday life. The truth is the young people in our companies are going to run this industry one day. What they need now is to be shown where the opportunities are and to be given a chance to rise to the occasion. Young people look to the current generation for inspiration and to figure out what they want to do to leave their mark on the world. In that way, they really aren’t much different from the current generation. Let’s work together to show the young people in our industry what kind of leaders they will someday be.