

INDUSTRY MESSAGE

Learning from Each Other



Most of us can name someone who has taken the time to offer assistance or advice during a crucial moment in our careers. I am fortunate enough to have had a number of mentors over the years, including my father, who is still the daily voice in my head. During the uncertainty of Covid, I was thankful for the judgment and wisdom of many colleagues who were also navigating the world of small business contracting during the pandemic. That these colleagues were facing similar challenges was a great comfort, and communicating with them made all the difference. During that time, the value of my NIA membership—and all the connections it affords—was especially apparent.

When my father died at age 59 in 2004, taking on his business was overwhelming, and some advisors recommended that we sell the company as soon as possible. In hindsight, it was good advice: The death of the founder can be devastating for a small company. Now, I realize that the most valuable asset my father left behind was not the physical assets needed to run the business, nor the customer base he built over many years (though both were important!), but rather his many devoted employees—industry veterans who had years of field experience and knowledge. The support of these loyal employees is the reason I am able to write this message today—and why my company has survived the past 20 years.

Although much has been made of our aging workforce and a lack of incoming talent with an interest in the work we do, we still have a vast amount of insulation-specific knowledge in our industry. There may be fewer young workers entering construction trades, and indeed the workforce looks very different from when my father was building his business, but there will always be talented young people looking for a career, as well as less-experienced employees of all ages coming from other industries. Within our companies and through associations such as NIA, we can work to provide mentorship and encouragement to this potential workforce.

Even as a generation of insulation professionals retire, there is still a lot to be gleaned

from the men and women working in the mechanical insulation industry. Seasoned industry professionals are worth their weight in gold and should be respected and treated as such. But let's not forget that we have much to learn from younger employees as well. They bring fresh ideas and energy, are technology savvy, and have an appreciation for the benefits of embracing work/life balance. Integration of time-honored techniques with untraditional approaches makes for a powerful organization and a better insulation industry. Listening to and learning from younger employees can help keep more experienced employees engaged and working in the industry longer. I relied on long-term employees—who had been mentored by my father for decades—to provide the stability necessary for my company and for me in a time of transition. Now, I am also learning from the next generation of professionals.

Attending NIA's Fall Summit and Spring Convention offers an amazing opportunity to gain access to some of the titans in our industry, as well as to our newer additions and first-time attendees. These events are full of potential mentors and connections. I would encourage industry professionals to seek out conversations and network with those in attendance. Make appointments and schedule time to share a meal or grab a drink. We are all in the habit of Zoom meetings post Covid, but there is nothing quite like a face-to-face conversation, in my opinion.

I have benefited greatly from interacting with experienced colleagues I met through my participation in NIA. This year, I am especially thankful for the guidance of my Past-President Advisors Dana Vlk and Dave Cox. Dana and Dave are former Presidents of NIA as well as industry experts, and I am grateful for their willingness to share their time, energy, and wisdom.

Let's be **Better Together**,

Laura Dover
President
National Insulation Association