



IEC

When Hiring Isn't Enough: The IEC Workforce Reality

**Why Training Capacity, Not Interest, Is the Real
Bottleneck**

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INDEPENDENT ELECTRICAL CONTRACTORS


Poll Question #1:

What Is Your Biggest Workforce Constraint Today?

- A. Finding applicants
- B. Finding experienced electricians
- C. Not enough people to bring apprentices along
- D. Retention
- E. Project demand outpacing labor growth



Recruitment Is Working... So Why Aren't We Growing?


- 
- Strong interest in the electrical trade
 - Increased recruiting efforts across the industry
 - Yet: persistent labor shortages remain



Core Tension: Input is improving, output is not scaling



We've Been Solving the Wrong Problem


- 
- Assumption: “If we can just hire more, we’ll grow”
 - Reality: Hiring \neq Workforce capacity



Key Shift: The constraint is not *entry*, it is *development*



Training Capacity Is the Limiting Factor



- 
- Apprenticeship requires structured development
 - Building electricians takes time, reps, and experienced people



Not a pipeline problem — a throughput problem



There's More to This Than Just Hours



- 
- On-the-job training (OJT)
 - Related technical instruction (RTI)
 - Code literacy
- 
- Being able to perform in the field
 - Safety judgment
 - Leadership capability



Result: Competency cannot be rushed without consequence



Why You Can't Just Double Apprentices Overnight


- 
- Supervision capacity (journeyman ratio limits)
 - Instructor availability
 - Job mix exposure
- 
- You still must make money while training people
 - Safety risk tolerance



These problems stack on top of each other



More Apprentices Don't Automatically Mean More Production




- 
- Most green apprentices slow things down before they speed things up
 - Requires experienced labor to develop



Implication: More apprentices increase load before they increase output



A New Response Emerging (Observed in the Market)

- 
- Intensive 80-hour (2-week) pre-apprenticeship
 - Safety-first: multiple credentials (incl. OSHA-10)
 - Basic field skills: conduit bending, wire pulls, device terminations
- 
- Tools + stipend provided
 - 100+ graduates; >90% placed immediately
- 



What It Solves:

- Reduces Day-1 friction on jobsites
- Improves immediate employability



What It Does NOT Solve:

- Does not create journeyman capacity
- Does not remove supervision constraints



What This Tells Us:




Acceleration at the front end, without changing the system bottleneck



Journeyman Are the Bottleneck

- 
- They produce AND train
 - They are finite and already fully utilized



Scaling constraint: You cannot scale apprentices faster than supervision capacity

Poll Question #2:

What Most Limits Your Ability to Grow Your Workforce?

- A. Not enough experienced journeymen
- B. Not enough time for training and supervision
- C. Too much project pressure to slow down and teach
- D. Too many apprentices leave before becoming productive
- E. We can hire people, but we can't develop them fast enough



You Can't Microwave Experience


- 
- 4 to 5-year development cycle
 - You build skills one layer at a time



Mismatch: Market demand moves faster than workforce formation



Useful Isn't the Same as Fully Developed

- 
- Competency develops progressively
 - Judgment matures through exposure and repetition
 - Being well-rounded takes seeing a lot of different work under good supervision



Important Distinction: Employability is not identical to full competency maturation




Demand Is Not Waiting


- 
- Electrification trends
 - Data centers, infrastructure, reshoring
 - Population and economic growth



Result: The work is growing faster than the workforce can respond.



The Work Is Moving Faster Than We Can Build Electricians



- 
- Workforce grows linearly
 - The work can explode faster than the workforce can



Outcome: Persistent and structural shortage



What We Are Now Seeing in the Market (Real-Time Signals)



- 
- Active poaching directly from jobsites
 - Crews leaving mid-project for higher-paying contractors
 - Even occurring on joint-venture jobs
- 



Signal: Labor is being reallocated, not created



Mission-Critical Markets Are Resetting Wages

- 
- Journeymen: \$65–\$75/hr (vs. typical \$35–\$40)
 - Per diem up to \$250/day
 - Daily “show-up” bonuses up to \$200
- 
- 1,000+ positions needing immediate fill (example: data center work)



Interpretation: The market is burning through every experienced electrician it can find

A blue square containing a white lightning bolt icon.

Additional Forces Entering the System


- 
- A red square containing a white lightning bolt icon.
- Increased IBEW recruitment activity
 - Strategic targeting of non-union contractors

A dark blue square containing a light blue lightning bolt icon.

Effect: Further strain on already limited skilled labor pool



We're Mostly Moving Electricians Around


- 
- No new electricians are being created
 - Labor is being pulled from one contractor to another



Key Insight: The system is cannibalizing itself under pressure



When You Can't Find People, the Market Starts Getting Crazy


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- Wage escalation
 - Incentive stacking
 - Aggressive recruiting tactics



Emerging Risk: Pressure begins to challenge journeyman standards



Slow Formation Meets Aggressive Extraction


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- Workforce formation remains slow
 - Market behavior becomes increasingly aggressive




Outcome: Instability, not resolution



The System Is Beginning to Experiment

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- Pre-apprenticeship acceleration
 - Alternative credential structures
 - Accelerated pathways
 - Prefabrication and specialization
 - Technology-enabled labor models



Recent Example: Texas approved an accelerated journeyman pathway structure (JEEP) increasing allowable OJT credit substitution through classroom instruction.



Key Insight: The industry is beginning to actively test which parts of the process can realistically be sped up.


Poll Question #3:

Which Change Do You Think Will Most Shape the Industry Over the Next 10 Years?

- A. More prefabrication and production-style work
- B. Accelerated training / alternative pathways
- C. Technology reducing labor demand
- D. Continued wage escalation and labor competition
- E. No major structural change — the industry adjusts naturally



Emerging Workforce Adjustments


- 
- Increased use of prefabrication
 - Task specialization
 - Alternative labor pathways
 - Technology augmentation




Shift: From craft-based model → More production-style approaches



Fast Decisions, Long Consequences


- 
- Diluted training quality
 - Safety exposure
 - Reduced long-term capacity




Big Risk: You can speed things up so much you eventually weaken the workforce




What Does a Sustainable Workforce Look Like?

- 
- Balanced apprentice-to-journeyman ratios
 - Protected training capacity
 - Intentional development pipeline





Not maximum speed, but a workforce system that can keep producing electricians year after year





Growth Has to Match Reality


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- Revenue targets must reflect labor reality
 - Workforce planning becomes a constraint exercise




Key Shift: From “Can we sell it?” → “Can we staff it responsibly?”




You Have to Think Further Ahead Than the Next Job

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- The workforce problem doesn't fix itself overnight
 - Decisions have lagging consequences






Better Question: What is our true production capacity 2–3 years from now?






What Contractors Should Do Now

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- Audit supervision capacity
 - Protect journeyman time for training
 - Align growth with formation capacity
 - Invest in structured apprenticeship
- 
- 



When the Market Will Not Wait...

- 
- The industry must adapt
 - But must not break its own formation system



Final Idea: The future belongs to contractors who can build people as reliably as they build projects

Three Forces Acting at Once



More People Are Coming In

- Recruiting working better
 - Pre-apprenticeship
- Better prepared beginners



But the Bottleneck Doesn't Move

- Not enough journeymen
 - Limited supervision
- Experience still takes years



Meanwhile the Market Is Going Nuts

- Wage spikes
 - Poaching
- Massive project demand




Final Thought



The contractors who succeed over the next decade may not simply be the ones who hire the most people. They may be the ones who develop people most intentionally.



Key takeaways:

- 
- Recruitment alone is insufficient
 - Formation capacity matters
 - Supervision bandwidth matters
 - Developmental quality matters
 - Market pressure is accelerating structural change



Questions / Discussion