

46 Years and Counting

by STEVE FELLMAN, TAUC GENERAL COUNSEL

AT THE END of 2018, I became Of Counsel to our law firm, and my partner Katie Meyer took over as TAUC General Counsel. After practicing law for 56 years, it is time for me to change focus, slow down and start spending more time with my family. Although I will still serve as Counsel to my firm and provide advice to clients as needed, my time “practicing” will evolve from my law office to the tennis court.

As this is my last column, I want to take this opportunity to tell you how honored I have been to serve as General Counsel to TAUC and its predecessor, the National Erectors Association (NEA), for 46 years. I thank you for the opportunity to serve the union construction industry. I thank you for the opportunity to develop working relationships and personal friendships with so many dedicated TAUC leaders and TAUC staff members.

When I started as NEA’s General Counsel in 1972, NEA was basically a union iron worker employer’s association. Its members were either fabricators, erectors or, in some cases, fabricator/erectors. Most members competed in regional geographic markets. However, NEA had two U.S.-based members — the American Bridge Division of U.S. Steel and Bethlehem Steel — which competed globally. At that time, these companies had a market share of well over 50% of the major bridges throughout the world. Since the steel industry had a history of antitrust problems, I was retained as General Counsel to make sure that no practices were engaged in at NEA meetings that could be considered antitrust violations.

When I started working for NEA, the association had no safety program,



no industrial maintenance members, no concerns about joint employer pension liability, and no involvement with environmental issues. There were no smart phones, tablets or laptops. A majority of the members were family-owned companies. The main purpose of the association was to develop a better means of cooperation with the Ironworkers and promote union construction.

Today, TAUC has evolved into an association of more than 2,000 union contractors representing a broad range of crafts working under the NMA. TAUC’s member contractors are multi-craft contractors focusing on industrial maintenance. TAUC is heavily involved in government affairs. An example is TAUC’s lobbying effort to craft a solution to the multiemployer pension liability issue. The TAUC Environmental Health and Safety Committee has effectively promoted all aspects of workplace safety. Each year at the ZISA® dinner, hundreds of contractors are recognized as having worked hundreds of

thousands and even millions of hours without a reportable injury. TAUC’s position as a leader in union construction was highlighted recently when TAUC President Jake Locklear was invited to the White House in recognition of the industry’s efforts to promote apprenticeship. At the annual TAUC Leadership Conference, multiple International Union Presidents sit down with major owners and TAUC contractors to discuss how to further the goals of all who work under the NMA. Earlier this year, TAUC had its first technology conference, establishing the association as a focal point in exposing contractors to new technology directly affecting construction. TAUC is also a major contributor to the Helmets to Hard Hats program. And *The Construction User* has developed into a major industry publication. I am very proud to have been a small part in TAUC’s evolution.

They say that “the past is prologue.” In looking over how TAUC has changed in the past 46 years, I can only wonder what the next 46 years

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But none of that matters. The leader sets expectations. The leader sets limits. The leader sets the tone. The leader sets consequences. For me as a CEO, it happens in a new employee's first staff meeting and in front of everyone on the team. I lay out what constitutes the "safe zone" at work. I tell them that if anyone gossips, shit-talks or character assassinates anyone on our team, they are fired that day. "And," I add, "don't test me -- because I have done it." Those who refuse to listen and test me anyway express their guilty outrage. They say, "You can't fire me." I say, "I told you upfront, now pack your shit in this box and be out of here by noon."

I am HR's nightmare. I am the team's protector.

My zero-tolerance approach is certainly not for everyone, but that is how seriously I take psychological safety and team acceptance. I don't just hope people are coming as their best selves. I encourage it, support it and, in truth, I demand it. People cannot do their best work operating out of fear. And what I find is that when an individual feels this and embraces it, they bring a level of commitment and productivity that you cannot pay for. Performance rises, retention increases, risk tolerance expands and positive group norms get set in stone.

Here are three ways to lead your teamwork through a workplace foundation of psychological safety;

1. Own your own emotions, behavior and insecurities. A leader that shows authenticity, vulnerability, and empathy gets loyalty and buy-in in return. You don't have to be the hard-ass 24/7. Some people think it might look weak – and that is most insecurity talking in your head. Being your best self, no matter what others think, is real strength.

2. Communicate your expectations. Recognize and praise openness and team risk taking. Treat failure as a team learning experience. And give people the time, coaching and resources to grow and change.

Internal change, especially when it comes to going beyond fear, can take time and courage.

3. Do not compromise, rationalize or ignore any destructive behaviors of your team. Not because they make you money. Not because they've always been there. Not because you are afraid to directly confront it and solve it. When you "just let it go," you let down your team and yourself.

Who knew that psychological safety could make such a difference at work? But really, isn't it obvious? What makes a healthy person, a healthy family or a healthy child? What helps them grow and thrive as they should? Yeah. Same thing. Psychological safety – it's worth the time, effort and commitment.



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"It is critical to begin providing schools the appropriate preparations for technical and advanced training programs," she said. "At Aristeo, members of our leadership team are involved in numerous industry associations that focus on strengthening *coursework and career development with multiple skilled trade disciplines. We believe that volunteering our time with these organizations is critical—they are important to the success of our business.*"

Aristeo employees also engage in outreach to colleges and universities. "We attend dozens of events designed to garner excitement for the construction industry and recruit candidates for a variety of positions across our company. Not only do we recruit heavily from

local universities, but we also attend educational sessions with students, where we have the opportunity to teach them about all the potential opportunities in the construction industry," Martinelli said.

"These steps, combined with additional change through policy, funding and other interventions, have the power to expand our industry and create a more diverse workforce."

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will bring. Regardless, I know that TAUC will continue its leadership role in successfully promoting union construction and union contractors.

Again, I thank all of you for giving me the opportunity to serve as TAUC's General Counsel and for providing the friendships that have made these past 46 years so enjoyable.



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On the other hand, a very low cap that applies to all liabilities could have a dramatic impact.

All multiemployer plan stakeholders should evaluate how the framework developed by the Committee would affect their funding requirements. Despite the inability of the Joint Select Committee to develop bipartisan recommendations by the November 30th deadline, members of Congress remain committed to advancing multiemployer pension reform legislation in the 116th Congress. This makes it critical for stakeholders to educate lawmakers on how different proposals would affect the businesses that sponsor these plans.

TAUC

Thank You
Steve Fellman
for 46 Years of Distinguished Service



All Our Best
as You Begin a New Adventure!