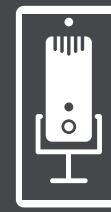


Episode: 57

Karla Meador



THE
**MOBILE
WORKFORCE**
PODCAST

Mike Merrill:

Hello, and welcome to The Mobile Workforce Podcast. I'm your host, Mike Merrill. And today, we are sitting down again with Karla Meador, who is a managing partner of NEAR Search Group. And what they do is they help place employees in positions that are available, help recruit, and promote opportunities for companies to fill their staffing needs. As we wrap up the year 2021, Carla, we wanted to bring you on and talk about what you see coming down the pike, and also what we've been going through this past year. Glad you're here with us today, and nice to have you on again.

Karla Meador:

All right. Great. Well, great to be here. Thanks.

Mike Merrill:

You bet. Just a question to start things off. What did see happen in the job market in the beginning of 2021?

Karla Meador:

In 2021, while we definitely saw an increase over 2020. What we saw even more so is people's confidence coming back, hiring, getting money, releasing budgets, et cetera, to build and develop, et cetera. I'd say was fairly robust. And as we talk a little further, you're going to see I think it's even going to be more so.

Mike Merrill:

All right. What impact did you see happen with COVID-19 in the career space for construction sector?

Karla Meador:

For construction, we did see a slow down. We saw some budgets put on hold, waiting to see if monies would be approved. As you know, some construction companies and larger companies get money from

government spend. Some of the programs that are being voted on right now. And that tends to trickle down to the specialized companies that build parts of that, whether it be bridges, or homes, or what have you. We saw a little bit of a slowdown, or a little bit of a stall. Then that slowly started to pick up. And I think people are pretty bullish on the construction future, the needs for all types of construction, whether it's infrastructure, personal, or rather people's homes or professional. That business is booming in a lot of cities.

Mike Merrill:

Yeah. We're seeing and hearing a lot of the same thing. And now, as we're recording this episode, we're just getting into Q4 of 2021. What does the landscape look like now as we're trending into next year?

Karla Meador:

The landscape to me ... I'll say kind of laughingly. It's a little scary, because it's that busy. As you know, there's a waiting list to get projects done. To get companies to come in to get your subs in. You see that, and you see a high demand for talent. It's a little scary for someone like myself. And I can imagine as a business owner, getting your talent or keeping your talent. It's a little scary, because I don't see much of a slowdown. Actually, I predict, and many others, that it's going to continue right on through 2022.

Mike Merrill:

Yeah. I think that is very in line with a lot of what I'm reading, hearing, and also just seeing as I talk to people and get with folks in construction specifically. One of the things that seems to be a new factor, a new challenge in the mix ... I've been reading a lot of articles about the great resignation. And that's actually a topic, which is just crazy. What do you see and hearing? And what's your feeling on what's going on there?

Karla Meador:

Yeah. I would absolutely say that number is accurate, if not a little higher depending on what you read. There is a wave of people that are looking. There's a wave of resignation. Some of the things that we're seeing ... not really talking to your employer if you're unsatisfied or dissatisfied. Just giving notice, because there's so many more opportunities. Where usually they would come to you and work it out, and say, "Hey, I haven't had that raise," or, "You promised me extra PTO for this overtime," or whatever it might be. We are seeing a lot more resignations, a lot of people leaving, a lot of people looking. There's a lot of reasons for that as well. But there is a plethora of people out in the market looking, and there's a lot of job opportunities.

Mike Merrill:

Yeah. So, kind of the good, bad of all of that. There's plenty of work to do and a backlog. But finding, retaining, and keeping talent sounds like it's quite a challenge. What construction companies do today, do you think, to retain better talent?

Karla Meador:

And that's a great question, because everybody wants that answer. And you're absolutely right. Tons of work. How do we get people, and how do we retain them? One of the things that I tell companies ... because a lot of companies do the same things, and you're competing on a wage level. If you get a dollar raise, somebody else will beat that. We see things like that. I have seen sign-on bonuses for some of the more skilled positions, if you're talking a civil engineer or project engineer. Sign-on both bonuses can attract new talent. To keep folks, we're actually seeing end of year bonuses.

I think companies need to be creative within their own culture. If you've always been a fun environment, make sure ... Maybe it's that Friday. Every Friday, free pizza and everybody's off at three. But you do have to do something to stand out. In some cases, we're seeing people with two, three, or four job offers when they hit the market in this field. You have to find what you're known for and good at and use that. You won't appeal to everyone. People look for new jobs for many different reasons, so you can't possibly hit them all. But find what you are known for, what you're good at. Ask

your employees what they really like about it and what they don't, and then play up to that.

Mike Merrill:

Yeah. I love that. That's a great thought. What about on the employee side? What can employees do to attract the attention of potential companies to hire them?

Karla Meador:

Well, obviously being on the internet. Being on LinkedIn. I'm still surprised that people don't have a LinkedIn profile. But LinkedIn, Indeed, Recruiter.com. There's all these different great ... and in construction depending on what your specific focus is, the chat rooms. There's all kinds of places like that. And obviously, networking. Just who do you know, who's in the business. Don't be afraid to pick up the phone and talk to somebody old school. But also, internet presence, because there's a lot of firms like myself. We're using algorithms and various buzz words based on your resume or your profile to find you and reach out to you. To make that the most effective, make sure that you have your social media profiles built up. And perhaps if you're a bit of a guru or a funny person, you can be on Twitter, or you can be on other sites as well. It'll still find you there.

Mike Merrill:

I love that. And I am curious, too. One other thing. We've had a big push on the podcast to have representatives from NAWIC, National Association for Women in Construction. Companies that are putting programs together for college students or high school students to get into construction. What are you seeing or hearing out there as it relates to better recruitment of women, and other more diverse candidates than what we've historically seen in construction?

Karla Meador:

Now, that's a great point, Mike. We are seeing that. That people are looking at areas where they typically wouldn't have focused just to ... if nothing else, beef up the coffers. Bring in people that are talented. One, companies of size ... construction companies are hiring HR people and/or diversity representatives. Diversity recruiters. They specialize in that, and reaching out to

minority colleges, and reaching out to women. And as you just pointed out, there's several organizations that cater to women. Women in business, women executives. It can be in construction as well, but just women in general. There's a plethora of groups. And definitely some mid and most all the large companies now have a program in place to target some of these underutilized career pools, if you will.

Mike Merrill:

Yeah. I love that. I think that's great. Are you seeing or hearing many women looking for roles in construction companies today?

Karla Meador:

I would wish I could say yes. Not that much yet. I think that's still some room to grow. I would say most of our candidates, especially if they're hands-on in the field, are men. Let's say more constructional architect, or civil engineer, or certain things you might see a few more women. It's not where I'd like it to be, or anyone would like to see it. But you do see more and more. And I happen to have a couple of friends in my city, which is Charlotte, that are women construction owners. But that's a rarity still. They're kind of a rare breed still. And how do we get more women and other minorities to feel part of that, and to learn and grow? That's still something we all are working on.

Mike Merrill:

Yeah. One really interesting position that we ... in fact, we have had a guest on recently that that is a young lady just out of college. And she's a drone pilot for a large construction company.

Karla Meador:

Oh!

Mike Merrill:

Yeah. Really cool. You'll have to check that episode out. But just for you also, that's an area where there are some really sharp ladies out there that would be fantastic drone pilots for these companies that have that need.

Karla Meador:

Oh, that's great. I have a friend that does that for real estate in terms of for sales and stuff for corporations, as well as personal. And I'd have to mention that to her. Interesting. We're talking because she actually switched from ... she's a pharmacist.

Mike Merrill:

Oh, wow.

Karla Meador:

So, has actually a PhD, and she switched to be a drone pilot for real estate companies. Just burned out and tired of the system. Wanted to do something different. And I think that's what we'll see more. I can say as a female, historically never in my high school and college career was it ever presented to me that I could do something in construction. Even architecture, and design, HVAC, any of that kind of work, it just wasn't presented as such. And now you see a lot of these STEM programs. More women in the science, and technology, and math. Engineering and math. I think those will help in time. But you're right. I don't even think it crosses our minds, and often it's not even pitched as a potential a career.

Mike Merrill:

Yeah. Great point. Well, the good news is always there's room for improvement. So, that's something positive we can take away from that.

Karla Meador:

Yeah, exactly.

Mike Merrill:

Tell me this. As far as 2022 ... coming fast here.

Karla Meador:

Yeah.

Mike Merrill:

The year 2021 went already. 2020 didn't happen, we all

know. What's something positive that you're looking forward to and that you're excited about for next year?

Karla Meador:

Positive and looking forward to. I'd actually like to see the growth. We're seeing a lot of spend. A lot of growth. A lot of monies improved. A lot of investment companies investing. A lot of government spend. So, it's going to be booming. I love to see new things popping up. I like that. And I think when times are tough, which they are particularly for owners ... it's kind of like the real estate market. It's great to be a seller, but not so much a buyer. Right now, it's a employee market.

I think that these tougher times teach businesses what they need to be good at, and they need to look at it. Are you working your people to death? Do you have fun, or are you paying the bonuses? Have you kept up and given everybody raises appropriate to the market? Maybe you've already done that 3%, 3%, 3%, but the market's going 10%. You will start losing your people, even the loyal ones. When the times are tough like that, I think good owners really become introspective with their selves and their business, and they become better. They'll become better next year. We'll have a lot of building going on. A lot of construction. And I think we're going to have better, smarter owners out of this instead of just kind of taking people for granted, because there's nothing going on and there's no jobs in the market. It's the opposite.

Mike Merrill:

Yeah. I think even with the challenges is with the pandemic and all the other things that we've gone through, the world has learned how to work remotely better. Regardless of when this dust settles from this current situation that we were all going through, we're going to be better equipped moving forward to work in these unique situations that we had never faced before. I think you're really onto something there with your take.

Karla Meador:

That's true. Y'all going to have to have your mobiles where you're doing FaceTime and everything else with the problems.

Mike Merrill:

That's right. Yeah. Yeah. It's a different world. I guess just like anything else, sometimes until you're forced to go through a situation, or a struggle, or a challenge, you don't realize the muscles that you got to build to kind of work through that. I think in construction especially, we've learned to do a lot better job at some of these areas that you're talking about. And I think for those business owners that are listening to this episode, just take inventory. Maybe look at those things, and maybe see if there's some areas that you can strengthen up, and improve, and bolster before you end up having more of those people looking for a position somewhere else.

Karla Meador:

Exactly. Some of the things that you mentioned. Increasing that diversity, and showing up some of your programs that ... why do people like to work for WorkMax? What is it that brings them to you? And make sure that is your message. I find so many companies gets watered down. What is it that you stand for? What's your message? What's your draw? And I think 2022 is going to be a chance to focus on that message.

Mike Merrill:

Yeah, that's great. Tell me this. If you were to boil it down to one thing today and just one takeaway for business owners, employees, whoever it is, what message would you share as it relates to what we've talked about today?

Karla Meador:

I would say value your people. Just the three words. Just value your people. I think that owners sometimes forget and companies do. And what we're seeing overall, most people don't believe it's not for money. It's for other things that are more important to them than even money. Money is actually the number two reason. Make sure you find what they value, and you're valuing that.

Mike Merrill:

Well said. Well, this has been great. I've enjoyed the conversation, Carla. So fun to have you back on, and

look forward to doing this again down the road when we have an opportunity.

Karla Meador:

Absolutely. 2022, I'm here.

Mike Merrill:

Sounds good. Thanks, Carla.

Karla Meador:

Thank you.