

Episode: 75

Damien Edwards



Mike Merrill:

Hello, and welcome to the Mobile Workforce Podcast. I'm your host, Mike Merrill. And today is the fourth episode that we're recording with Damien Edwards, who is the national director of production for Toll Brothers Construction. If you've not heard it before, please check out again, episode number 6 and also number 73, where Damien and I discuss how the job site represents the business and also the skills that construction managers need to be successful in the eyes of their clients. So make sure to check those out when you get a minute. Today, Damien and I are going to talk more about the importance of productivity and how accuracy and immediately getting data and information collected is a best practice for construction and managers. So Damien, thanks for joining us again on the show today. Looking forward to the conversation.

Damien Edwards:

Me too. Thanks for having me. I truly love our conversations. I think they're very productive and I think they're beneficial to the industry as a whole. We're so smart.

Mike Merrill:

I've really enjoyed getting to know you over the last year plus and look forward to continuing these conversations into the future.

Damien Edwards:

Definitely.

Mike Merrill:

So I'm all the way from Dallas right now. I'm at a trade show actually at a AWC in-tech expo. So we're exhibiting here as a company and I'm pretty excited

about being here in person again. So that's something a little new for the trades the last year or two.

Damien Edwards:

Awesome. It's awesome.

Mike Merrill:

Does Toll Brothers get out to any events like these by chance?

Damien Edwards:

We do. We do. We have a motto where we're better together and there's just a camaraderie and there's just a sense of belonging when you're together with people as opposed to over a Zoom or whatever. So, we do. So we're a very social company. We love each other and we love getting out there, learning new things, going to trade shows, going to builder shows, things like that. So it's exciting to be able to actually go and do those things again. You forget how important that in-person interaction is until you start doing it again. And you're like, "Oh yeah this is why we do what we do." It's for people and for being together. So yeah.

Mike Merrill:

Amen to that. Well, yeah, that's the thing we're hearing from everybody at this event is, "Man we've sure missed this." So been nice. Well, so let's talk about the conversation we're on to discuss today. So tell me this, obviously, you've got a new title and role at Toll Brothers. You're the national director of production, right?

Damien Edwards:

Yep.

Mike Merrill:

That's an important part of construction. What do you think companies should be doing or need to be doing to manage their productivity on projects, or subdivisions, or homes, or whatever aspect of construction that they work in every day?

Damien Edwards:

Well, you know what? And this is something we've talked about before. It's really about the data, really truly understanding what it takes to build your product whatever it happens to be, whether it's residential, commercial, or whatever, and analyzing the data and having the capability of gathering that information, looking at it critically and then determining, "Okay, where can we improve? Where are we falling behind? Where are we ahead and what are best practices?" And honestly, technology gives us the ability today to capture all those metrics and to in some cases analyze it for us. Although I prefer to look at it with my human brain, but really the best thing that I could suggest that people do is gather as much data as they possibly can and look at it critically.

Mike Merrill:

It's a great statement. And I think just a lot of companies are still missing the boat on that. So today, obviously the market is very dynamic and unique. It's unprecedented in what we're seeing. There's a shortage of skilled labor, right? So that's a commodity that is really, really hard to get your hands on, but materials too, the supply chain. There's such a premium on all of these pieces and components that go into building something that it's more important now than ever to track where that thing's at, when was it put in? When is it complete? Because you don't know when you're going to get the next one, you've got to really to complete a project, you have to have all the parts and pieces. So tell us about your view of that.

Damien Edwards:

So I'll kind of go around about and tell you about that because I think that this because we have such a drain or such a hardship with our supply chain right now, there is so much innovation coming out

of it with technology and the ability to actually track product. Yeah. About six or seven months ago, I saw this huge board and it was a map of the United or the map of the world. It had all these little dots on it. And I said, "What is that?" And the person I was talking to was like, "They're shipping containers." We're now tracking our products worldwide. Can you imagine? That's, I mean, 10 years ago, no way. Today, it's almost a necessity. "Where are our light fixtures?" "Well, they're coming across the Atlantic right now." It's amazing the innovation and the technology that is coming out of the past couple of years in this pandemic that we've had and our ability to track individual pieces of our homes or construction project or whatever is amazing. It's nothing short of amazing, so.

Mike Merrill:

Yeah, I know like you're mentioning, it's like there's this technology, boom, right? There's so much information and it can be too much, right? Or I think the bigger problem than just too much data is people aren't leveraging the data that they actually already have, right? They don't know how to look at it, or they're not making changes to manage improving production against that data, right?

Damien Edwards:

I think part of it is they have to trust the data that they've got, right? So there's this because change in construction has traditionally been so slow, especially the adaptation of technology. I think in some cases there's a real reluctance to start using the data in an effective way. I think there's still a bit of an old-school mentality where it's like, "Nah, if I want to know what's going on, I got to drive to the job site." That's not necessarily the case anymore. If your data is accurate you don't have to go to the job site. I mean, CM, the construction manager has to be there every day but if you're a management or you're in some kind of an outside role looking in or managing multiple communities or multiple job sites, you don't necessarily have to meet everyone every day if your data is accurate and you can see who's showing up, who's progressing with the schedule, who's being paid, what materials are on the job site and you can track all that through data.

Mike Merrill:

Yeah. Yeah. I love that. I know. I mean, when I think back to when I was a custom home builder and then I did some production stuff did like 80, almost 90 homes in one year that were semi-custom or at least tweaked and modified per customer. And one of the things, an early CM that I had, she had worked for a large production builder and she was used to scheduling things pretty tight, but she didn't have any overlap. And so what I started noticing, I'm like, "Man, we can build these homes faster." There's things we could be doing like the mechanical and the electrical could be in there at the same time and we might actually help them resolve some issues and run as they're going to have instead of one of them all the way done. And now everything you just did is in the way where if they were out there at the same time, maybe they could have collaborated a little bit and communicated.

Damien Edwards:

I'll give you a great example of that. So years ago, this is a long time ago because I'm getting old. I worked for a builder and they had one day in the schedule for trim delivery, a second day for install another day for cabinet delivery, another day for install. So, and I say another day, but it was like two or three days to install the material. So I mean they were looking at like two weeks to go from delivering trim to cabinets installed. So we were analyzing the data. We're like, how can we cut time out of our schedule? And we're like, "Well, here's a novel idea. It's the same crew that installs the trim in the cabinets. How about we get all of that, all the material delivered on Monday and they're done with everything by Wednesday. And we just took back a week and a half from our schedule."

Mike Merrill:

Nice.

Damien Edwards:

And we wouldn't have known that if we didn't have the ability to analyze the data and say, "Okay, what tasks are taking longer than they should?" So we're looking at these durations and we're like, "Wait a second." Across the board in every community, we've got this long duration between the delivery of all this stuff or

the install of trim and install of cabinets. And we're like "It's the same vendor, the same contractor doing all this work. Why is he there for two weeks?" "Well, they're waiting for material." So it's just there's a lot of innovation that can come from analyzing the data and you got to look at it critically. You can't just be like, "Well, that's the way it is." You got to look at it and say, "Is there a way to improve this?" And you know, get multiple people looking at it because no one person has all the answers.

Mike Merrill:

Yeah. That's true. So speaking of all the answers, so what, obviously you're a huge construction company. You guys produce high-quality custom homes but in great volumes, you got to have a lot of subcontractors, lots of hands in the pot. What types of reporting metrics or what kind of data are you able to get from your subcontractors to help manage those projects?

Damien Edwards:

So we don't really collect data from our trade partners. Really what we do is we monitor production schedules. What's the duration of, how long does this task take? How long does it take us to go from X point in the schedule footers to under roof? Or how long does it take us to go from drywall to cabinets installed? So we're like, we look at the durations and then we decide if we can make improvements, where the best area of improvement is. So there's a lot that goes into it, but we don't put that burden on our trade partners. I mean, right now they're strapped with enough problems. They've got the same problems as everybody else. They can't find material, they can't find labor.

So a lot of times we'll go to our trade partners and we'll say, "Hey, we notice this is taking X number of days. Is there a way that you can shorten the time, the duration for this without sacrificing quality?" If the answer is yes, "Great. What can we do to help facilitate that? Is there a movement in the schedule that we can accommodate so that you can get through this house quicker?" But I mean, the key is without sacrificing quality. You can build a box in 15 days but that doesn't mean anybody wants to live in it. So we need to make sure that it's a balance between speed, efficiency, and quality. We need to meet all three of those.

Mike Merrill:

Yeah. And you are talking about, again, just like you mentioned earlier with the getting additional materials out there that the same crew could utilize it the same of time. That's an efficiency that's obviously smart, right?

Damien Edwards:

Yep. Absolutely. It's just a smarter way to do business. If you can minimize the number of trips that your vendors or your trade partners have to the home, that is a win. They're going to be able to work more efficiently and they're going to make more money because they've got less trips out to the job site and it's a win for the builder because the builder is eliminating days from their schedule. So they're reducing their cycle time at the same time. There's all kinds of ways to be innovative in production. It really just takes critical thinking and the collection of data so you can see trends over time and over multiple job sites because you can't just look at one job site and make a decision for all of them. You need to be able to identify the trends, what is happening across multiple jobs, and in some cases across multiple states or multiple geographic regions to really be able to analyze the data well and to make those innovative decisions.

Mike Merrill:

Well, and what I'm hearing is obviously that data and having information is critical, but then best practice communication with that information, right? And that's leadership. That's how a construction manager is going to get a sub back on track is good communication.

Damien Edwards:

Absolutely. Yep. Communication is key to anything, right? It doesn't matter whether you're talking to your trade partners, your management team, your homeowners, or whatever. Communication is the key to all things, I think.

Mike Merrill:

Yeah. So tell me this. Do you ever have crews that are out there performing ahead of schedule that seem to be super-efficient or more efficient? Are there favorite crews that the CMs like to utilize because of

somebody's history or track record and what are they doing different than maybe a crew that doesn't seem to be as efficient?

Damien Edwards:

So I'll give you a kind of a vague example. So I will go to two different job sites. Let's say I have a job site on either side of the street and I can go to one of them and say, "Hey, who's your best trade partner, who's your worst trade partner?" And one guy will say, "They're all terrible." I always pick on the plumber. "My plumber is the worst." I go across the street and I'll say, "Hey, who's your best trade, who's your worst trade?" And they'll say my best trade probably my plumber and I really don't have any bad trades." And I'm like, "Hmm, what's the difference?" The difference is the level of management between those two construction managers.

One is actively managing their job and making sure that they're ready for the next trade when they show up and the trades love them because they can show up one time, get their job done, and make money whereas on the other side of the street, the job is not being actively managed and the trade it's a crapshoot as to whether or not we're going to be ready for the trade when they show up. So that same trade partner that they're saying is their worst is probably not making money on their job. So when you start talking about management efficiencies, it's the people that actively manage their jobs and their schedules and are ready and proactive and ready for those trade partners to show up.

Those are the ones that don't have bad trades because they love working for them. It's when we get behind and we get lackadaisical and we're not proactive anymore that we start to run into trouble and the trades are, I mean, they're here to make money, right? They love what they do. They're craftsmen, they're here to make money. If they show up on a job site and it's not ready for them, they're not making money. So that's when the trouble all starts. So it's all about management and being proactive. If you can do those things, if you can actively manage your job and be proactive about it, you're not going to have any bad trade partners because they're going to love to work for you.

Mike Merrill:

Yeah, and that's funny, I'm having a flashback. I remember I had an excavator that I used to love to use and it was because he was so hands-on and we just had this great relationship and that guy would do anything that I asked him to do. I didn't ask him to do anything unreasonable and when he needed help or needed a solid, I would do him a solid. And then when I needed something, he would do me a solid, but I would talk to some of the other contractors that he did work for him. They didn't have nearly as high of an affinity for him as a sub, as I did. And I thought, "Well, I'm glad you don't like him because that means he's more available to me. And he's one of the best subs I have."

Damien Edwards:

Let me tell you, I used to tell people that you are not a real construction manager until you have freaked out in the middle of the street. And maybe it's maturity, maybe it's age. Maybe I'm just smarter than I used to be. But I have realized that you get more by building relationships with the people that work with and for you than you do by demanding work out of them. So a lot of times like you talk about your trade partners doing a solid look for you when you run into a jam. I'm telling you the trade partners that I had the best relationships would've done, anything for me and vice versa. They knew if they had a problem, they could come to me and say, "Hey, I have a problem with this. Can you work with me?" And I'd say, "Absolutely." Because we were partners in the building of the homes, not antagonists which unfortunately there's still a lot of that out there. We got to weed that out because that's not the way this industry needs to be heading. We need to be partners. All of us need to be partners, so.

Mike Merrill:

I think that's great and talking about communication, I know again being a general contractor and a high-end production home builder, your perspective and view is unique among all the trades, but what do you at least witness out on the job site when you see these trade partners or these specialty subs out there performing work or doing their job, have you noticed any trends or anything with one or the other that seem to be doing a better job? Are they utilizing technology better than the other ones? Are they on top of things better because of that technology?

Damien Edwards:

That's what I was going to say. Actually, the trade partners that embrace technology are hands down, more organized. They seem more efficient because just like a general contractor or builder is analyzing their data, trade partners can do the same thing. They have the ability through technology to know which of my crews are most efficient. Who's the best at doing, putting whatever, roughing in a home for HVAC versus putting the trims in at the end? Who's leaving with the most amount of material and coming back with some because they're more efficient in the way they're cutting it, or they're assembling mechanical systems in the field? The trades that embrace technology have the same advantage of any builder that's embracing technology because they can see where their resources are being spent and they can look at it critically.

So I made a comment to you a while ago about first time I saw a plumber with an iPad on the job site I was blown away. And that is one of the best plumbers I ever worked with. And they embraced, and this is years ago, but they just embraced technology. And the foreman used to come to me and they'd be like, "Hey, Damien, I'm looking at your schedule and this doesn't match this house." And I even say, "Hey, hey, hey, hey, hey. Hold on, I'll fix that." So the same way that builders will get on their trades about schedules, trades that are super-organized and have embraced technology will do the exact same thing.

They'll come to you and say, "Hey I noticed this house is ready for me now, can I jump ahead in the schedule? Can I get into this house now?" Or, "Hey, you've got me scheduled for tomorrow. This house isn't ready, I'm going to need to push this back two days." Or whatever, And it becomes a collaboration rather than just, I'm telling you to do this whether I'm ready or not. So technology has truly changed the way builders and trades do work today. No question about it.

Mike Merrill:

Yeah. Well, and I know there's a couple of different approaches there. There's general contractors, self-performed. They're doing a lot of their own labor, right? And I think in a lot of cases, it's because they want to take control of that schedule. They want to take control of the material usage. They want to take control of all of the things that they can get their hands wrapped

around. And then there's the other angle where we sub everything out. And it's really the onus is on that construction company that's a specialty trade working for us. And sometimes the attitude can be, "Well, it's all fixed bid." Or, "It's all piece rate. I don't really care how long they take." And people say that out loud. And I'm thinking, "Are you kidding me? Of course, you care. What do you mean you don't care?"

"Well, we care but we don't don't really care." And I'm thinking, "What does that even mean?" So to set us straight on that and tell us why the guys that say they don't really care are totally up in the night missing the boat. And then on the other side what could companies do to take control of their piece of this so that they're doing what's best to run their business efficiently as opposed to, "Oh, we're just doing it this way because we're kind of stuck doing it that way because we don't have a better way, right?"

Damien Edwards:

There's a lot to unpack there. I would say, anybody, any GC that says they don't care what the duration of a trade is has no idea what they're leaving on the table, right? Construction is expensive. It is expensive. And it doesn't matter if you are a trade partner or a GC, you are borrowing money to complete the jobs or you are delaying payment by not completing jobs on time. So if you don't know how long a duration's going to take, you cannot properly plan for that. You can't properly schedule. When I'm talking about creating building schedules, one of things I always say is one of the reasons we create a schedule, which is the Bible in construction is so that we critically think about the project that we're working on.

It forces critical thinking. How long does each task take? Who comes first, who comes second? And if you don't know the length of time of any of your trade, then you are doing a disservice to your customer. You're doing a disservice to your other trades because they're not really going to know when to show up and you're doing a disservice to any stakeholders you have in that company. And just as a side note, if you ever want to actually know the true duration of any task in construction, you ask the oldest to most experienced construction manager on the job site and they will tell you exactly how long everything takes because they've been there.

Mike Merrill:

The second part that I hear often is people say, "Well, we have to do it this way because." Maybe their way of controlling costs is to point it off on someone else and say, "We're going to have them worry about that and we're just paying by the piece. So whatever time it takes, that's their loss, we're just going to pay them for the job, right?"

Damien Edwards:

And there's something to be said for a turnkey trade, whether it's framing or whatever. But if you don't understand the costs that's truly involved with that, you are leaving yourself open for overpaying for a product or worse underpaying and have the vendor come to you after you've already established your budgets and saying, "Hey, you know what? I was wrong. I said it was going to cost \$20. It's actually 30. Sorry for wrecking your budget and your profit margin, but I'm going to need another \$10 if you want me to finish this project." And both scenarios are terrible.

If you're paying too much for it then you're charging too much for it probably to hit whatever your margin is. And you maybe are missing out on customers that would purchase from you. But your price is just a little bit too high because you don't truly understand what you're you're doing. Accuracy is so important and I hate to keep bringing up technology. But with the advanced bidding software that's out there, there was no reason to not understand every dime that's in any trade partner's bid price because you can do the take-off yourself and just compare it apples to apples, so anyway.

Mike Merrill:

Right. Well and back to what you're saying, you talked to the oldest construction manager. Well, then there's probably an estimate of total hours that put together that people know what it's supposed to take. And then there's people that are pencil whipping those and sharing those hours with other parts of the budget to try and hide the delay so that they look good as opposed to really tracking what it takes, right? And then now you're bidding new projects based on bad data. And so those are going to be off and pretty soon everybody in the field with the boots on the ground knows, "Well, none of that stuff really means anything.

I know what it takes and it's just going to take what it's going to take." And so there's really no, it's just the Wild, Wild West out there. And until somebody holds people accountable to a number and has a system in place to measure and manage against that, then you just got people doing whatever they want, right?

Damien Edwards:

Yeah. It's funny you say that because I ask construction managers all the time. If a trade comes to you and asks for an extra, for whatever reason, more two-by-fours, whether it's excavating, hauling dirt out, or whatever, are they right? Is that number right? And they're like, "Well, I assume it is because they're the expert." And I'm like, "Are they? Do you have a way to double-check those numbers to make sure that they're not just guessing or that they're not making up for a mistake they made on another job and they're charging you for it?" So making sure that you have accurate numbers and a way to quantify material whether it's extra stone, hauling dirt, two by fours, extra masonry material, or siding, or shingles, or whatever. Accuracy is so important because you can absolutely blow a budget like that by not being accurate with your takeoffs or your extras.

Mike Merrill:

Yeah. Well, and even as a construction manager, once you've had accurate data, once you've had a look at what it really takes and what's required to complete that type of home or whatever that framing job or this type of roof, now you can hold that accountability again on the next one, right? To the next crew and you can really raise the bar for all of your subs and have something to manage from that's still pushes them a little bit but it's also attainable.

Damien Edwards:

Yeah. That historical data is priceless, priceless, so.

Mike Merrill:

Yeah. Accurate historical data, that's the weapon that will help address some of the delays and the challenges that we have right now for sure.

Damien Edwards:

You got it, that's it.

Mike Merrill:

Well, and when there's a backlog again, and just to your point, it's like if these little delays that stack up, I mean maybe there's 10 less homes a year that Toll Brothers actually completes on and gets a final on, right? And then pretty soon you're stacking those up and then the next year, and maybe there's 50 homes that never get built, right? That end up going somewhere else or that decide they're not going to build right now because of these delays. I mean, these things have an impact and every big challenge is made up of a lot of small challenges that stack up, so.

Damien Edwards:

Absolutely. Yeah. I mean that historical data is what's used to forecast. How long is it going to take us to build these houses? Well, according to this historical data we have, it takes us X number of months to build a house. Therefore, I know exactly how many houses I can build this year based on that data. It's critical. It's critical that the data is accurate.

Mike Merrill:

Yeah. So it sounds like you've obviously, Toll Bro's been around for a very long time, right? And, and so you have...

Damien Edwards:

Yeah. More than 50 years.

Mike Merrill:

Yeah. It's unbelievable. It's very rare that a company's been around that long. So you've got that to leverage that expertise from, but today, because these tools are so accurate, I just think that companies really need to make sure that they have an accurate handle on what's going on. They're using the best tools to track this data so that they're not basing everything off of flawed numbers, right? Garbage in on the front, you get garbage out on the back, right?

Damien Edwards:

Yeah. And that's the challenge, right? Because the data is entered by humans and humans are flawed. So it's super critical to make sure that if you are collecting data, the people that are actually doing the input are accurate. And that requires some boots on the ground sometimes to go out and make sure, okay, this is what my data says. Here's what my job site actually looks like. Do they match? And if they do, fantastic. You can trust the data. If they don't, you got some tweaking to do. We'll never, in my opinion, eliminate error from data because it all entered by humans and it doesn't matter what industry you're in, but we can get pretty darn close. So, and pretty darn and close I think is good enough to analyze and make decisions from.

Mike Merrill:

Yeah. Yeah. I agree with that. And I think I don't know if you can share or not but what are some tools that Toll Brothers uses to measure or manage this process of production on their homes?

Damien Edwards:

Sure. So we use, and we're not the only, there's a tool called BuildPro by Hyphen Solutions. And it's used by quite a few national builders and it's fantastic. It's fantastic. So we can look at it and we can monitor production schedules. We can look at durations, we can look at data on a, if we want to look at individual tasks across our geographic region, we can do that. I don't want to be a commercial for Hyphen Solutions, but it's a good company. They've got a great product. BuildPro allows for interaction between the trade partners and the builder. It allows for document sharing. It allows for payment to the vendors. It's a pretty robust tool and it allows for quite a bit of reporting. So it's a pretty good tool. All of our guys have been trained on it and we use it on all of our jobs.

Mike Merrill:

Well, and the key to me is the purpose of that solution is it's really a communication and collaboration platform, is what it sounds like to me.

Damien Edwards:

That's one of the most powerful features it has because our builders can speak directly to the vendors through BuildPro, SupplyPro is the vendor side of it. And it's instant. We talk about historical data, you can record, you can build a community, and then you can go back afterwards and analyze the data and say, "How long did this take? What were our hold-ups? What did we do faster than we thought?" It just allows us to have to capture the data and comments from the trades. So if our trade partners are like, "Hey, if we get a consistent comment from the trades, hey, we know we need to make an adjustment." Because there are the people that are actually boots on the ground building the homes are telling us that this is a consistent issue.

We can make it a change very quickly. Every builder should be using some type of enterprise software platform like that. If they're not, they're really missing out because you and I have talked about technology in construction in the past, and if you're not using a shared program that allows for communication, scheduling, payment of bills, document sharing, there are some efficiencies that you're missing out on by not using some type of a program and like that.

Mike Merrill:

Yeah. And then what are the boots on the ground using live in real-time on a daily basis to get that live data into a system like that? I mean, it just seems critical that the more accurate you can collect the data at the source as it's happening, the better's going to come out on the other end, right?

Damien Edwards:

Well, and that's part of the beauty of a system like that. They're all cloud-based, whichever system you're using they're all cloud-based. You can use them from your phone. I see, I watch construction managers use our program from their phone, from their iPads, from their laptops. There's no reason in this day and age that data's not accurate because just there are too many ways to enter data into a system like that. So, I mean, you can probably do it on your watch. I've never tried it. I still have a pad of paper and a pen, but I'm sure it's coming. We could just talk into your watch, "Plumber is complete." Or whatever.

Mike Merrill:

Love that. Well, and I would imagine, again, as you're hiring trades partners, you're probably more inclined to work with those that are advanced because you're going to get better communication and data from them, right?

Damien Edwards:

No question. Well, trades that have accepted technology and used technology are just more organized. Technology forces efficiency, or at least it shows you where the efficiencies can be improved. And the trades that are truly successful are constantly striving to improve their efficiencies just like any builder. So those are the trades... You want to surround yourself with the people that are the most successful, the most innovative, and most driven. And that's no different when you're talking about builders and their trade partners that they choose to associate with. You want successful trades because they're going to make you better as well.

Mike Merrill:

Yeah. So with that, for example with BuildPro, are you getting data daily? Is it weekly? Is it the end of the week, or Mondays, or?

Damien Edwards:

It depends on the user. BuildPro allows for daily data dumps if you want it. BuildPro actually updates twice a day. It's like noon and five or something like that. So if you wanted to look at it daily, you could. Most builders that are using BuildPro are not looking at it daily. It's that's a little too microscopic. Most look at it weekly and monthly because construction isn't that fast, unfortunately. So if you are really looking to monitor progress, you got to be a little, little more removed. So monthly is probably the best way to look at it.

Mike Merrill:

Okay. As far as historical trending and kind of where you're going.

Damien Edwards:

Exactly. Yeah. Yeah. Maybe weekly, if you're just looking for critical path items that have been completed, number of critical path items completed in a week, you can look at it weekly. I tend to look at it weekly and monthly because I'm looking for different things, depending on when I'm looking at it. On a weekly basis, I'm looking for number of critical path items completed. Monthly, I'm looking for a little more sections of construction completed. How many houses went from framing started to mechanical trades started or whatever, or drywall complete to cabinets complete, things like that.

Mike Merrill:

On a regular basis, what are you doing from a process standpoint to make sure your crews are staying on pace when you're managing projects remotely? I mean, what are you finding to bring success there?

Damien Edwards:

Well, we don't manage projects remotely. We have a construction manager on every job. So we don't have the issue. I know there are a lot of builders that do have trades that will work without direct supervision or management from the builder. I personally think that's too risky. You can't monitor quality. And that's one of the reasons at Toll Brothers, we have a construction manager on every job because quality is baked into the culture at Toll. So the thought of trying to manage a job remotely is not even in our wheelhouse because the trades understand there are multiple, multiple quality inspections that are going to happen and it's driven by the construction manager. So I know builders build remotely. I don't know how they do it. I trust all my vendors and my trade partners, but I also have to verify everything that they do.

Mike Merrill:

That's good. Well, I think one thing that I've heard you, I mean, you've talked about it consistently on most of the episodes that we've recorded so far and again today, but it's sounds to me like utilizing fantastic data collection tools, cloud-based systems to communicate and collaborate and to document this information

is aside from the personal side of things like that's probably Toll Brothers one of your secrets to success, would that be accurate?

Damien Edwards:

Absolutely. Absolutely. And it's the secret to success of every builder that wants to be successful has got to have the ability to collect data and analyze it. There's just no way around it. You cannot identify trends, identify inefficiencies, or best practices if you're not monitoring the data. You have to be able to see what your people are doing or how your projects are progressing. You need to be able to see what's taking long? What's quick? What's costing you money? What's saving you money? I don't see how today you are successful without gathering as much data as you possibly can and analyzing it on a regular basis. I just don't see it. I don't know how we built 50 years ago when Toll Brothers built their first house in 1967, I don't know. I don't know. It's tough. It's funny though because when I talk about technology when I first got into construction, we shared a computer.

Mike Merrill:

Yeah. Yeah.

Damien Edwards:

Crazy. I guess we did a good job building then. The days where the schedule was posted on a wall in a trailer and we would move the cards around.

Mike Merrill:

Corkboard. Yeah. Alignments.

Damien Edwards:

Yeah. So it's funny, I look back and I'm like, I'm mean I build a lot of houses without a computer, so I guess it can be done. But in today's day and age, I think you would struggle if you weren't utilizing some form of technology to build your homes or your structures or whatever it is you were working on.

Mike Merrill:

Well, and the timeliness of documentation of recording even if you're not reviewing it or necessarily making big decisions until weekly or monthly, I think that real-time collection is really the key to making sure things are accurate.

Damien Edwards:

Absolutely.

Mike Merrill:

Love it. Well, so I guess, just to wrap up, what is Damien's superpower?

Damien Edwards:

Probably my I can't do attitude. I don't believe that anything is impossible, nothing. And that's what I preach to my guys in the field that they can do anything they want to do. They just have to do it. I learned a long time ago. And I'll tell you a quick story, I graduated college when I was 32, right? It took me 10 years to graduate college. Had a career, had a beautiful wife, three lovely children, but the whole time I was going to school, I never believed that I kind of deserved it, right? I was never like, "I deserved to get a college degree." No one in my family with a college degree. So I wasn't going to go to graduation. I was 32 years old. I didn't feel like standing there with a bunch of 21-year-olds.

But my wife was like, "You have to go because our kids need to know where you've been going at night for the past 10 years." And I'm like, "Okay, I'll go." And when I walked across the stage and they handed me my diploma, it hit me like a ton of bricks. I did this, I deserve this because I did it. And it dawned on me I can do anything. I just have to do it. The hardest part of anything is just doing it. And when you're done, you'll be like, "Well, that wasn't so bad." And so for me, my superpower, I guess, would be that I know I can do anything that I want to do. And that's my attitude. I can do anything I want to do as long as I do it. And everybody else can do anything they want to do, they just have to do it. So it's just a can-do attitude. I know I can do it, whatever it is. And so can everybody else, they just have to have that attitude.

Mike Merrill:

That's a great note to end on. Well, it's been a pleasure once again, we appreciate your wisdom and insights, your willingness to share. We're thankful to Toll Brothers for allowing you to spend a little bit of your precious time helping out, so.

Damien Edwards:

Yeah. Good people.

Mike Merrill:

Well, we'll connect up again down the road and I definitely will share that travel schedule with you. Maybe we can line up.

Damien Edwards:

Sounds good, man. I appreciate that. Awesome. Always a pleasure coming on the show.

Mike Merrill:

All right. Thank you, Damien. Have a good one, man.

Damien Edwards:

Thank you.