

STRUCTURAL BUILDING COMPONENTS MAGAZINE

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SCDA Update

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Test Your Skills: Part 2 by SCDA Staff

We've been talking about it for months, so unless you're reading this column for the first time, you probably think you know all about the SCDA Technical Skills Evaluation (TSE). You know it's intended to assess the skill levels of existing employees, and measure the level of knowledge of new-hires in the business of selling and distributing engineered wood products.

In fact, from a business perspective, the TSE is structured to allow you to determine the strengths and weaknesses of all your technical staff. With questions on math, industry terminology, wood science, codes and standards, load development, product selection, plan reading and field applications, the exam is intended to give a comprehensive assessment of each technician's skill sets. But your guys have worked for you for YEARS. You taught them everything they know. You know exactly what their skill level is...or do you?

You might be surprised. How do you respond when someone asks you why "Product X" is better than "Product Y"? "Because my supplier says it is." No, of course you're not going to say that. But do you know who on your staff can legitimately address such questions, with the engineering or math formulas to support their position? Who is your OSB expert? What about floor joists? Beams? What have you based these decisions on? Is it something quantitative and measurable, or is it because they can memorize a salesperson's spiel faster than someone else?

Engineered wood products have been around for a number of years, but the number and types of products are increasing at lightning speed. "New and Improved" versions of old standards appear with regularity, and every time you turn around there's someone who's thought of a better-cheaper-lighter-stronger way to make a beam, joist, chord or panel. It's not realistic to think you can keep on top of it all. And so it follows that neither can your employees.

When you administer the TSE to your employees, take the time to do the pre-exam evaluation of your staff to accurately assess your expectations of their TSE performance. When you get the results you might be surprised, or you might validate your original assessment. One thing is certain—you will find out exactly who knows how much about each of the eight different sections. Then you can USE that information to your advantage. Build on strengths, and create experts. Plan trainings to shore up revealed deficiencies. (SCDA plans to offer training once our member base reaches 200. In the meantime, talk to us about other training resources.) Use one employee to mentor another. In the end, everyone will be stronger for the experience, you will have a more technically savvy staff, and everyone will know who's the "expert on staff" for any given product, service or skill.

Next month we will discuss the next step—how to market your improved technical expertise to your advantage.

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