

how firms hire new workers.

Despite January data implying the demand for construction jobs was slowing, the number of [open positions for which](#)

report from Associated Builders and Contractors.

So, contrary to how things looked earlier this year, construction's labor shortage remains elevated.

These renewed hiring numbers are an optimistic sign as the industry faces high interest rates, recession fears, and "slow implementation of America's infrastructure rebuilding program," said Anirban Basu, ABC's chief economist.

Nevertheless, there simply aren't enough people available to fill those jobs. In f

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## A potential return to self-perform

"There's a huge amount of the craft workforce knowing its worth and expecting benefits commensurate," Patterson said. Skillit—which counts Brasfield & Gorrie, Haskell, and JE Dunn among its clientele—has begun to see a shift toward workers who desire full-time, "W-2" positions, as opposed to seasonal or project-based work, he said.

"Ultimately the labor shortage means you either continue to rely on subcontracting ... or take control of your own destiny," Patterson said. Hiring more full-time tradesworkers is something Patterson said he sees major players doing in the near future.

Zandy said he has seen some of that practice in the North Texas region, with major GCs trying to self-perform more concrete work or other similar site preparation work, to enhance their margin, lower their bid price and win more projects.

"GC's used to do everything, but over the years we've become construction managers," Zandy said, a sentiment Patterson echoed.

But tradesworkers increasingly know their worth, and have begun to have a bad taste left in their mouth by hiring practices like seasonal furloughs, which leave them with lack of job security, Zandy said.

Wages aren't the biggest sticking point right now and job hunters want a career that will help support them in the long term, according to Garrett Johnson, director of regional talent for Suffolk Construction's Northeast region.

Johnson said workers seek a company that can help them upskill and find a clear career path and future.

"A lot of it has to do with training opportunities, that's a big one," Johnson said. "A lot of cases they're looking for you to provide a career path or career ladder."

Meanwhile, Zandy, who is a proponent of lean building practices, said a major aspect of lean and successful recruiting is respect. Firms instill a sense of respect and belonging when they improve tradesworker amenities like dining areas and ensure restrooms are clean and separate from the workplace, he said.

## Continuing to fill the gap

On a recent visit to his son's school for career day, Zandy said he asked the fourth graders what they wanted to be when they grew up. Everyone had the same response: a Youen t ?

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### **About the Author**

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