

The U.S. Needs More Tradespeople and Women Are Answering the Call

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With a projected [650,000 construction jobs open in the U.S.](#) and fewer workers entering the trades than in previous decades, the United States is facing a skilled worker crisis.

While the manufacturing industry emerged strong after the COVID-19 pandemic, it could be facing up to 1.9 million unfilled manufacturing jobs if the current trajectory doesn't change.

“At a time when there is both booming consumer demand for home improvement, construction and maintenance work, as well as growing concern over worker disengagement, the skilled trades have a huge opportunity,” states the [2021 Angi Skilled Trades in America study](#).

The aging of skilled workers

The aging of the skilled worker population is an area of concern. According to the Angi study, the median age of tradespeople in 2021 was 43 years old, approximately 10% older than the median age of the general U.S. population at the time.

“For every five plumbers or electricians that retire, only one young person comes into the trades behind them,” says Erin Izen, head of philanthropy and community investments at The Home Depot Foundation. “Without tenured tradespeople to train the next generation, the problem will continue to build, impacting our country’s economy, infrastructure and more.”

“The shortage is a result of younger people not entering the trades for a variety of reasons—from stigma around the work to a greater focus on college and less focus on key high school courses, like shop class, [that] introduce young people to these career opportunities,” says Angie Hicks, co-founder of Angi.

“Traditional trade [and] blue-collar jobs in manufacturing and farming experienced a significant decline at [the] end of the 1970s,” explains Lawrese Brown, a workforce expert and author of [*Don't Have To Go To College: Discover Well-Paying Jobs That Don't Require a 4-Year College Degree*](#). “The response to this shift was a ‘college for all’ emphasis in [the] 1980s, driven by the belief that college was the best vehicle to prepare for the ‘service-based economy,’” Brown says.

Women joining the trades

With this lack of available workers, employers in the trades are looking to recruit people beyond those who have historically held these types of jobs.

The U.S. Department of Labor Women’s Bureau offers programs that empower women to join these career paths, like the Women in Apprenticeship and Nontraditional Occupations (WANTO) Grant. Grant recipients provide training, mentorship and education to women in their community with the goal to increase opportunities for women to enter these higher-earning careers and close the gender wage gap.

According to the U.S. Department of Labor, the number of women working as tradespeople reached its highest level ever in 2021, at more than 314,000 skilled workers. Between 2014 and 2022, the number of female apprentices more than doubled, and in 2022, 13.8% of women were active apprentices compared to 9.4% in 2014.

Women thriving in skilled trades

After growing up in a family that valued higher education, KB Amador was working as a social worker when she had what she calls her “[quarter-life crisis](#).” Finding little fulfillment in her full days stuck in an office, Amador decided to explore other employment options. “It dawned on me that I

needed a change, and that's what started my dive into the trades.... I knew I wanted to use my hands and mind to work."

Amador explored several different jobs in the trades before enrolling in the welding program at Madison College and beginning an [apprenticeship](#) with Steamfitters Local 601. Now, she is a steamfitter foreman for Hooper Corporation and trains apprentices.

"Being a woman on the jobsite, the first day, you always turn heads, but once everyone sees that you're there to do the job and you do a damn good job, they're usually really welcoming," Amador says. "It's also fun to walk on a new jobsite now because I run [the] work, and my apprentice is also a woman. It's something you don't see every day, but there are definitely more women joining the trades than when I started."

When LeAngela Runels became a mother while pursuing her political science degree at Eastern Michigan University, she left school to focus on raising her child. She eventually started a cleaning service that offered construction cleanup, which opened her eyes to opportunities in the skilled trades. She entered a carpentry program through Goodwill's Green Works, where she was recognized by the leadership team and referred to the welding program.

Runels now works for Ferrous Processing & Trading as a welder and appreciates the work-life balance that the position affords her. "Working in the trades allows me to focus on my personal life after close of business. Oftentimes, white-collar jobs require time and attention that extends beyond the workday and affects other aspects of my life. As a welder, I am able to go to work, fix what needs fixing and go on about the rest of my day."

A flexible work environment is something that Angie Snow, principal industry adviser at ServiceTitan, offers to her employees in her own business. "As someone who entered the industry while raising four children, I've experienced firsthand the many benefits the trades provide, like flexibility, work-life balance and job and financial security. To help support women and men in my own HVAC company and promote balance, I offer my employees [four-day workweeks](#)."

Kimberly Santiago, GAF Roofing Academy program manager, started her career in academia and was working part time in the office of a construction subcontractor when she became interested in their roofing business. She eventually quit her job in academia and enrolled in the GAF Roofing Academy.

Santiago explains the benefits her blue-collar job provides that her white-collar job did not. "It offers hands-on experience that allows you to see the tangible results of your work, which is quite motivating and rewarding. Demand for skilled labor and tradespeople is always high, so job security is another perk. And since demand is consistently high, a job in the trades can offer competitive wages and faster career advancement."

Women in the trades are encouraging others to join them

The sisterhood of tradeswomen is strong, and you can see that in the way they encourage other women to join them in jobs they love.

A recent TikTok trend started by @tiltedindustries had women in the trades sharing why they loved their jobs in the trades and encouraging other women to join them as pipe fitters, sheet metal workers, mechanics, train operators and more. Using the hashtags #bluecollarbesties and #womenintrades, women shared hiring tips and disclosed their wages and other job benefits like free schooling, pension plans and equipment stipends.

When Cassie Pound, co-owner of Quality Heating, Cooling, Plumbing & Electric in Tulsa, Oklahoma, attended a conference in her industry, and the panel of speakers was entirely white males, she knew she needed to do something to claim her place at the table. “There was a conversation on social media, and someone said, ‘Maybe there [are] not any women with the same business acumen as these men,’” Pound shared. “And I said, ‘OK, we’ll go find them then.’” As a direct result of this experience, Pound started a weekly podcast, *Power Women of the Trades*, where she and her co-host, Leslie Harpole, interview women who own businesses in the trades and dispel common misconceptions.

Andi Barney teaches sewing machine service, repair and restoration through her virtual program, Sewing Doc Academy, a full-fledged business with over 1,200 participants. Most of Barney’s students are women, and many are over age 65. “For decades, women have been demeaned and told they weren’t capable of learning, good with tools or smart enough to figure it out,” Barney explains. “Amazingly enough, many of these women are turning their skills into a retirement income or side business.”

Tips for women who are interested in entering the trades

Whether a job in the trades is a career pursued straight out of high school or a [second career](#) after years spent working behind a desk, there are opportunities for women.

“Don’t be afraid,” Santiago says. “It might not seem like there is room for women in this industry, but we need to own our space and show that we can do just as well as the men out there.”

“My advice for women entering this space is to make sure you surround yourself with people who care about you and this industry,” says Cassi Torres, vice president of High 5 Plumbing, Heating & Cooling. “I have visited many shops and not all are built the same. Your environment matters, so make sure to find a company [that] will invest in your training and support you and your goals.”

According to Krystal Greenhaw, owner of Wise Coatings of Raleigh, it’s all about showing your skills. “I move forward each day, not focusing on being a woman in this area, but focusing on what I can bring to the table. I would suggest others do the same and have more women interested so we all have more empowerment in the field.”



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[Kate Loweth is a writer and editor based in the San Francisco Bay Area with over a decade of experience covering travel, parenting, business and culture. Her work has appeared in outlets including USA Today, Business Insider, AARP, AAA and Thrillist. Kate is happiest when she's traveling with her three teenagers and exploring a new city or national park.](#)

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