



The Evolving Role of the Transportation Workforce: Delivering Leadership and Professionalism

By Kevin Bocock, Josh Lawrence

In the [first blog in this series](#), we looked at the importance of recruiting and developing the next generation of transportation professionals. Bringing new people into the field is an important step, but understanding what qualities they must possess once in their roles is equally important. Construction managers and inspectors play a critical role in the success of transportation projects, and they must be poised to contribute meaningfully.

To explore what sets strong transportation professionals apart, we spoke with Kevin Bocock, PE, CCM, Senior Vice President and Transportation Services Leader, and Josh Lawrence, PE, CCM, Vice President and Service Line Manager, two leaders who have spent their careers supporting a wide variety of transportation programs. Their insights help explain why these roles carry significant responsibility and how the people behind the work influence every aspect of a project.

Q.

WHAT SETS STRONG TRANSPORTATION MANAGEMENT AND INSPECTION PROFESSIONALS APART, AND HOW DOES THAT BENEFIT THE PROJECT TEAM?

Josh: The biggest difference is taking ownership. Not only do transportation professionals observe and document the work, but they also actively engage and take action to support decision making and keep the project on track. They plan, prioritize, assess risks, and focus on the details that matter in anticipation of the next phase of work.

The bottom line is valuable transportation professionals are proactive. When you come prepared and stay engaged, you can see potential issues early. Skilled inspectors and managers see the whole picture and recognize misalignments before they become problems. Early communication gives the contractor room to adjust and provides the owner with confidence that the project is moving in the right direction. People often underestimate how much rework and confusion can be avoided by simply talking things through at the right moment.

Kevin: I agree. Anyone can fill a position, but that does not mean they are contributing in a meaningful way. The people who make a difference are curious, prepared, and genuinely interested in how the pieces of the project fit

together. They take the time to understand the plans, the owner's goals, and the contractor's approach. Treating all members of the project team with understanding and respect makes a big difference in project outcomes.

The difference becomes obvious when challenges arise. Conditions change, materials behave differently than expected, or an unforeseen issue emerges. You have to stay calm, gather the facts, and help the team understand their options. On complicated projects, the gap between someone who is engaged and someone who is merely present becomes very clear. Professionals help the team navigate issues to protect quality, schedule, and overall project goals.

Q.

HOW DO PROFESSIONALISM, COMMUNICATION, AND ETHICS INFLUENCE PROJECT OUTCOMES?

Kevin: Ethics are evident every day. They can be seen in something as small as choosing to bring up a concern as soon as it is identified and explaining it without exaggeration. Credentials such as the PE and CCM also come with clear expectations for ethical behavior, including being factual, fair, and objective, and those standards carry over into how we work in the field. The transportation industry is a small industry. News travels fast, and without integrity and trust, your career is not going to last long or be successful.

How you speak to people and how you handle conflict set the tone for the relationship. When you conduct yourself professionally, people see that you are there to support the project, not assign blame. Contractors respond differently when they trust your judgment. Owners rely more heavily on your insights. Designers look to you as someone who will accurately represent their intent. Those relationships are what help projects succeed.

Josh: Communication is at the heart of what we do. Reports and paperwork are important, but they always come second. They are useful tools for recording and explaining field conditions, but they do not solve problems on their own. Staying involved, engaging contractors and partners in the field, and discussing perspectives reduces the likelihood of misunderstandings and conflicts and keeps the project moving forward. Doing so with a positive attitude is even more important when challenges arise, as no one wants to be in battle mode, and recovering from missteps is a tough hill to climb. Real issues are resolved through civil conversations, not documentation alone.

Q.

HOW TO MINDSET AND ADAPTABILITY SHAPE A SUCCESSFUL TRANSPORTATION PROFESSIONAL?

Josh: Mindset and attitude are just as important as technical skill. Some of the most valuable learning happens during challenging times. When things are running smoothly, you may not need to engage in critical thinking or creative problem solving. When a project encounters difficulties, you have to understand the situation, communicate clearly, and find solutions. That is where people grow.

Kevin: You can teach someone how to perform a test or read plans, but you cannot teach them to care about the outcome or relationships. Those who excel feel responsible for their results. They prepare, stay alert, and contribute ideas. That mindset elevates the entire team and improves the project.



HOW IS TECHNOLOGY RESHAPING EXPECTATIONS, AND WHY DOES THE HUMAN ELEMENT REMAIN ESSENTIAL?

Josh: Technology has dramatically increased the speed and volume of information we document, track, and communicate, but it does not replace judgment and requires consistent training to avoid ‘garbage in, garbage out’ outcomes. Tools can show you what is happening, but they cannot tell you how to interpret it or how to respond in a way that supports the next phase of the work. Field work still depends on understanding what the contractor is trying to accomplish and communicating in real-time. Those are human skills.

Kevin: Technology is a tool. It is not a strategy. That distinction matters. People need to be comfortable with technology and be able to learn new software quickly. Across projects, clients use different systems. You may work with one platform for one project and something entirely different on the next. Professionals need to be adaptable and willing to learn.

Artificial intelligence is an area where we will see growth. AI will help us analyze data, track patterns, and streamline administrative tasks more efficiently. But AI can only go so far. People need to review the information, assess the context, and decide what makes sense. The ability to apply common sense and engineering judgment to complex information will remain one of the most essential skills for the transportation workforce.



HOW DO TRAINING AND MENTORSHIP PREPARE THE WORKFORCE FOR HIGH-QUALITY RESULTS?

Josh: Training builds awareness. It helps people understand procedures, requirements, and expectations before they step onto a job site. Mentorship goes deeper. It gives people a place to ask questions, talk through situations, and hear how someone else approached a similar problem. On-the-job experience ties everything together and helps people apply what they have learned in real time.

Kevin: Mentorship benefits everyone, not just new professionals. As a mentor, I often learn as much, if not more, from my mentees as they do from me. Being a mentor also helps me stay engaged with projects and understand the current challenges that we are seeing. Often, there are patterns or commonalities between projects that emerge from these conversations. Identifying those patterns allows us to share information across our entire team and develop training that helps everyone stay aware and do their jobs better.



HOW DO CHALLENGING PROJECTS HELP PROFESSIONALS GROW?

Kevin: Complex projects offer the best opportunities for individuals to make meaningful contributions. When something unexpected happens, you have a chance to lead, solve problems, and show the value you bring. Those situations often become defining moments in a person’s career.

Josh: Challenging projects provide valuable opportunities to learn about yourself and develop perseverance and grit, especially when you can lean on a mentor for advice and support. You learn how to handle uncertainty, stay calm, and make good decisions while balancing multiple priorities. People who embrace those moments grow quickly and build confidence and self-awareness that carries them into the next phase of their careers.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

The conversation with Kevin and Josh makes one thing clear: even as tools and technology evolve, the strength of the transportation industry will continue to come from the people doing the work. Projects rely on professionals who stay curious, communicate openly, take ownership, and remain adaptable as expectations change. Preparing the workforce for the future means investing in training, mentorship, and continuous learning.

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