

(Right) Pepper Construction Company's Rich Tilghman fields a question during a portion of the Chicago Urban League's Contractor Development Program. (Below) Stacey Kelly of the Builders Association delivers a few words to the attendees.



Bringing Up The Basics

Pepper's Rich Tilghman Imparts On Emerging Contractors Importance Of Customer Service, Solid Business Practices

A glass half-empty state of the industry doesn't mean that newer contractors can't make the glass half full by following the right business practices in the process of making a name for themselves.

That was one of the many messages delivered by Pepper Construction Group Senior Vice President Rich Tilghman to an attentive audience of owners of developing construction businesses as part of the Chicago Urban League's Contractor Development Program. Tilghman became the latest in a series of Builders Association members to address the class, and while being honest about the state of the market, he also delivered an optimistic message to emerging companies hoping to navigate the industry's choppy waters.

"In terms of the construction market, I've been in the business for 32 years and I've never seen it as bad as it is right now," he said. "But, that doesn't mean that you can't succeed.

"Everything leaves an impression. You have to leave the right impression on others in the industry that you come across. You have to do the right thing all the time, and make it a normal business practice."

Coping with a tough market, according to Tilghman, requires a renewed focus on the basics of strong customer service from construction firms. Financial viability is everything, which means contractors need to continually work to make certain their customers are happy.

He placed particular emphasis on face-to-face meetings and understanding of the contracts those companies sign.

"One of the most important things you can do is know your contract, backward and forward," Tilghman said. "It's hard to do a job that's going to keep that client coming back if you don't know



what's expected of you."

Tilghman also listed a set of "Golden Rules" for newer construction firms, which included:

- Develop solid relationships
- Know your contract
- Always do what you say
- A good estimate means a good job
- There is no substitute for quality

Other presentations finished the class, including a few words on the benefits of the Builders Association from Project Manager Stacey Kelly.

The Builders Association is proud to have a number of members involved in the Contractor Development Program, a 10-week course set up to aid existing minority firms. Through the Program, the Chicago Urban League helps these businesses boost their infrastructure, pick up budget planning techniques and as a whole run more efficiently. For more information on the Contractor Development Program and how you can get involved, contact Urban League Senior Construction Officer Tia Young-Robin at 773-624-8826 or tyoung@thechicagourbanleague.org.