

Chief Executive Officer (CEO) / Owner

Nature of Work

A CEO is an individual who utilizes skills and knowledge, acquired through education and experience, to manage the execution of all or a portion of a construction project. Because the typical construction project is comprised of many different types of personnel, equipment, materials, and activities, the CEO must possess a wide variety of skills and knowledge. These include being able to read and interpret architectural/engineering drawings and specifications; understanding and complying with numerous local and state building codes, legal requirements, and construction standards; understanding and adherence to a variety of construction contract conditions and requirements; efficiently estimating cost and scheduling all or a part of a project; and the performance of management duties required to effectively coordinate and communicate with all members of the construction process.

The work environment of a CEO is varied, ranging from work in comfortable permanent offices to working on the project site in a small temporary office. CEOs spend a great deal of their time working with the project designers (owner representatives), clients (owner), and with other contractors, foremen, and/or other employees who are responsible for the day-to-day work in the field. Writing and reviewing reports in order to discuss work schedules and progress can consume a large portion of the CEO's time. Extensive travel is not unusual. CEO's typically work long hours, and must meet critical production deadlines. Weekend work is common.

Education and Training

The vast majority of today's CEOs are college educated, and those planning a career in construction should strive for a baccalaureate degree. While the construction industry will always require many persons educated solely as architects, engineers, or in pure managerial skills, the most effective education for contractors, at all levels of managerial responsibility, is a meaningful synthesis of general education, math and science, construction design, construction techniques, and business management at the undergraduate level. Typical construction program courses include mathematics and English, history and economics, physics, strength of materials, structural design, mechanical and electrical systems, materials and methods, planning, estimating, scheduling, technical report writing, contract documents, business management, and contract law.

Degrees in Construction are now available at over 100 colleges and universities. Although they may have different titles all are generally classified as Construction, Construction Science, Construction Management, Construction Technology, Building Science, or Construction Engineering. The American Council for Construction Education (ACCE) accredits pure construction degree programs while the Accreditation Board for Engineering & Technology (ABET) accredits construction engineering and construction technology programs. In 1996 there were 43 ACCE accredited programs. There are also six construction engineering programs, and about 45 construction technology programs accredited by ABET. Entrance requirements range from average to above average high school grades and scores on standardized tests (i.e., SAT, ACT). Students may transfer to construction degree programs from two-year junior and community colleges.

Although higher education is desirable, the construction industry remains one of the few American industries where one may start with little formal education and still reach the top by becoming a chief executive or owner of a construction firm. This path to the top, from trainee, to craftsman, to CEO, requires hard work and a great deal of personal dedication, and it becomes more difficult as technology advances.

Advancement Potential

New graduates usually begin employment with construction firms as assistant estimators, assistant project managers, or at some other mid-management position. As such, they are immediately involved in the day-to-day operations of the firm or a construction project. Responsibility comes quickly, and advancement is relatively rapid in this fast-paced occupation. However, it takes many years of experience and responsibility before a graduate is considered for position of CEO or company ownership.