

CASE STUDY

Leading on All Fronts:

How Turner Construction is building the next generation of field leaders

Turner

NCCER

National Center for Construction
Education and Research



The Problem: A Demand for Leaders

Large-scale construction projects often succeed or fail based on the strength of their leadership. This is likely one of the factors affecting the industry's performance challenges where only 8.5% of billion-dollar construction projects finish on time, and can take 50% longer to complete than originally planned.¹

Traditionally, leaders in our industry rise through a combination of hard work, talent and time. However, waiting for leaders to develop

organically is no longer a viable option. In an era when megaprojects are increasingly common, and the competition for skilled workers is intensifying, the demand for quality leadership is higher than ever.

This is not an abstract challenge. A single delay, logistical error, or safety incident can cost millions. This is why on a \$5 billion site outside Kansas City, Turner Construction is not leaving the quality of their leadership to chance.

The Solution: Leadership Training That Works

At the center of Turner's approach to leadership development is NCCER's Construction Foreman Certification Program. Turner's commitment to the certification is driven by two realities. The first is rooted in a simple company-wide value: quality work starts with the people in charge. As Rob Cooper, a trades manager at Turner and a driver of this leadership initiative on site put it:

"This is the first company I've worked for where it was top down instead of bottom up. Usually, companies look at what the employees are doing wrong, this company looks at what we, the leaders, are doing wrong."

The second reality is a matter of urgency. As construction projects grow larger, client expectations rise as well, and more workers than ever are being asked to step into leadership roles. Trey Myers, a project safety manager at Turner, described it plainly:

"When these guys come into the industry, they tend to have limited leadership experience. We may need them to lead a crew of five tomorrow. The demand is only growing. These projects are getting huge."

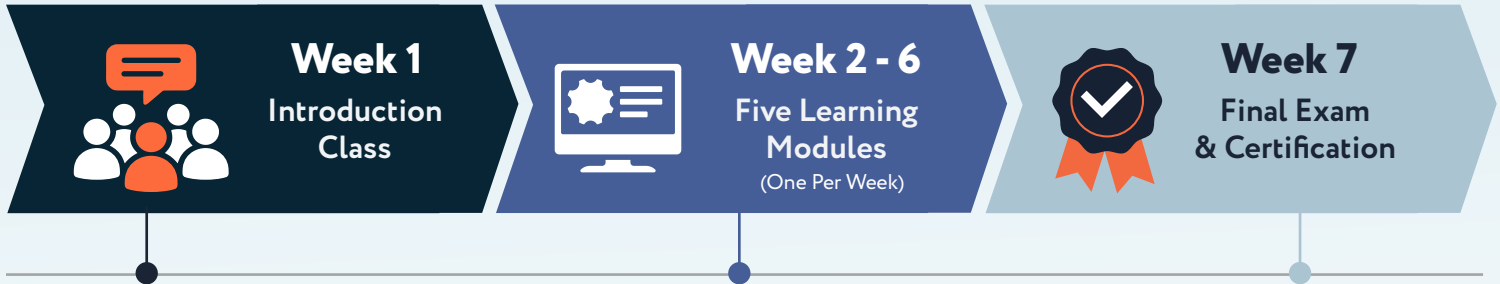
Turner delivers the certification program across a seven-week time frame as seen in Figure 1. Learners are given dedicated time during their workday to complete online courses independently, then meet as a group each Friday where Cooper and his team lead discussions on what they learned, work through activities, and apply concepts to the challenges their site faces. Forty foremen have completed the certification on this site alone, and the results were exactly what Turner was hoping for.



Figure 1: Turner's NCCER Foreman Certification Program

How Turner delivers the certification's five modules over the course of seven weeks

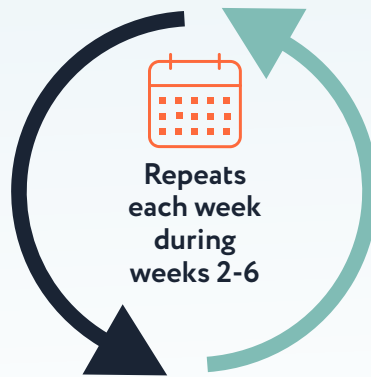
7 Weeks to Certification



The Weekly Learning Cycle (Weeks 2-6)

1 Independent Learning

- Three paid learning hours per week
- Complete online module
- Work independently on assignments



2 Applied Group Session

- Participate in one facilitated session weekly
- Discussion and takeaways
- Work through activities
- Apply learning to real jobsites



The Result: Putting Improvements to Work

To assess the benefits of the Construction Foreman Certification Program, NCCER had five supervisors complete a retrospective survey, rating each foreman’s effectiveness before and after completing the certification program. The supervisors rated the foremen across the five leadership development areas included in the program:

- Leadership and Supervision
- Communication
- Quality
- Productivity
- Safety and Health

The responses indicate that the supervisors observed meaningful improvements across all five facets of leadership the foremen were trained on with productivity seeing the biggest relative increase as seen in Figure 2.

To better understand the effectiveness of the program, NCCER surveyed 15 foremen who had just completed the certification

asking them whether they applied any of the skills they learned on the jobsite. An overwhelming 94% reported that they had already applied skills they learned from the program to their work as seen in Figure 3.

When asked how they have applied what they learned, the foremen identified use cases across multiple areas of their work. For example, they said:

“I can now clearly communicate exactly what I want the first time instead of having to repeat myself over and over to my crew.”

“I’m definitely more attentive to the finer details and making sure to increase productivity within our schedule.”

“My team’s overall performance has improved since I have grown my leadership skills through this training.”

Figure 2: NCCER’s Construction Foreman Certification Delivers Gains

Supervisors reported trackable improvements in foremen effectiveness in all five leadership development areas.

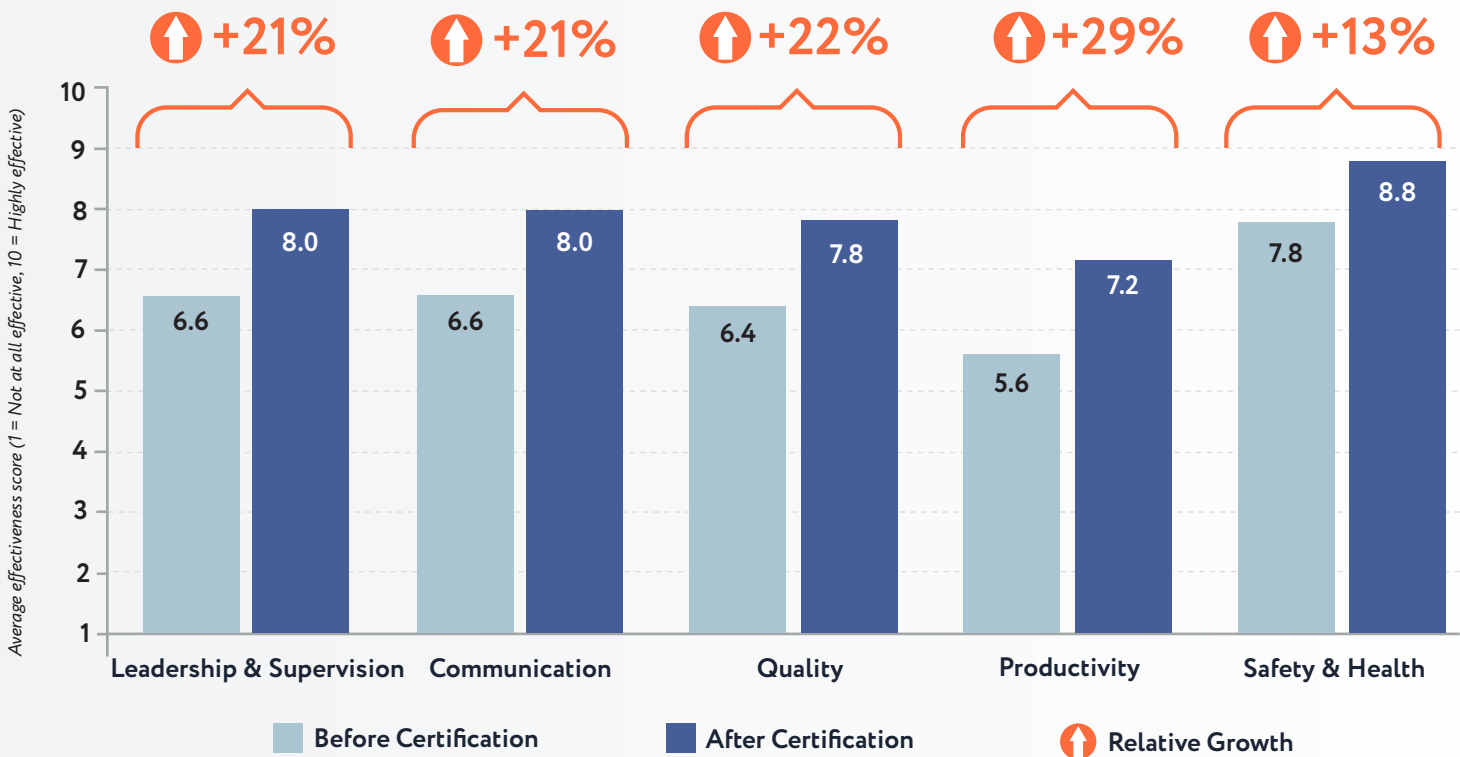
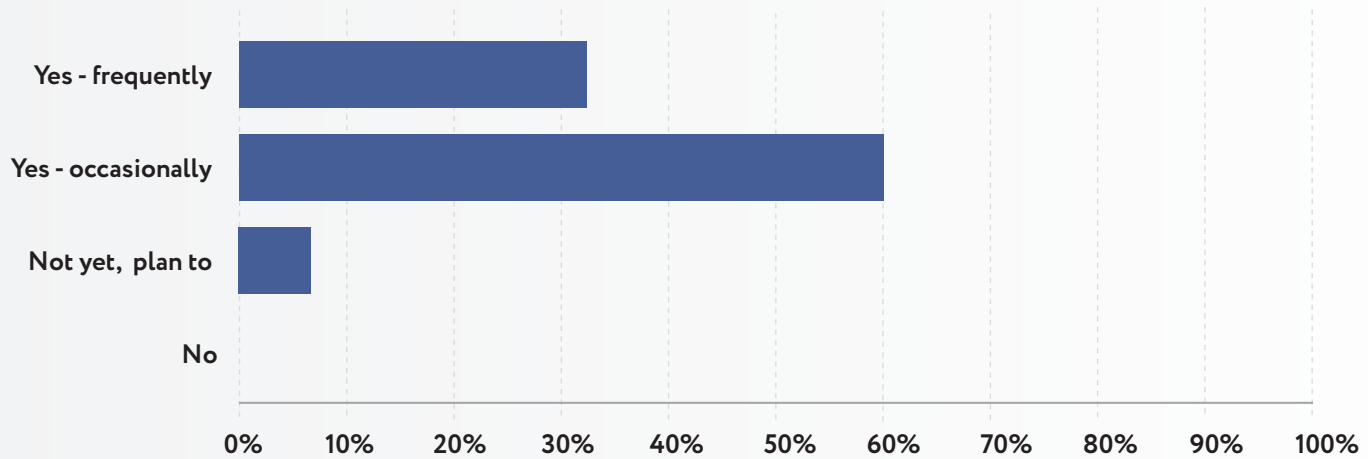


Figure 3: Foreman Graduates Using New Skills at Work

NCCER surveyed 15 newly certified foremen and found that 94% had already applied skills learned in the program on the jobsite.



Conclusion

These results indicate that not only does NCCER's Construction Foreman Certification Program improve a leader's effectiveness, but it also drives real changes in how individuals lead on the jobsite.

As a result, Turner has already implemented the NCCER Construction Foreman Certification Program at multiple projects across the nation. Cooper was direct about his intentions:

"This is something I plan on using every single time I go to a different jobsite and have foremen that need training. I plan on implementing this every single place we go."

Turner is not alone. The most progressive construction companies are recognizing the fact that developing field leadership is a strategic necessity. The informal, learn-as-you-go model that defined field leadership development in construction for decades is quickly becoming obsolete. The companies pulling ahead are the ones that stopped waiting for leaders to emerge and started building them.

Sources

¹ [McKinsey & Company](#)



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