

A Tool List for Employees

by Dave Crosby

Instead of reviewing a tool this month, I'm going to provide you with one — a management tool.

As a site superintendent in a tight labor market, I've often found myself in the position of hiring and training less than qualified individuals just to keep the job going. Most of our new employees have been genuinely interested in construction but also young, new to the trades, and rarely in possession of more than a few basic tools.

We usually start these new hires at the top — the top of a trench, that is. In short order, I get a sense of their work ethic and attitude and can decide whether they're keepers. Of those who stay on, most soon ask what else they could be doing and what they have to do to get a raise around here.

While any good supervisor welcomes

the opportunity to bring a new troop along, that willingness is sometimes tempered by the disproportionate investment of time and effort required up front. You don't want to waste time on someone who isn't going to work out, but you don't want to let a promising apprentice get away, either. After several disappointing experiences and a few successful ones, I came up with a system to make the process easier for everyone.

The System

When new employees ask the big question, I hand them a list of the tools I expect them to have at each of four levels of expertise: helper, apprentice 1, apprentice 2, and journeyman carpenter (see below). What they do from that point on is up to them, but I now have a way to gauge their interest and moti-

vation. If they start showing up with tools, I start training them. If not, well, you know the rest. In unusual cases, I arrange to help promising individuals buy their initial complement of tools and see how it goes from there.

As employees learn how to use more tools productively, they can count on more in their paycheck. As they approach the end of the list, they should be either self-sufficient, happy (that is, well-compensated) workers on my crew — or my competition.

Some employers do not want employees to supply certain tools for insurance and liability reasons. Conversely, I have worked for companies that supply no tools or equipment. However your business works, such a list can provide your employees with a concrete answer to a difficult question and a step-by-step way of making the workplace better for everyone.

The list reproduced here can be photocopied or downloaded from our website (http://www.jlconline.com/jlc/archive/tools/tool_list/tool_list.doc). If your working circumstances differ enough to require other tools, adapt the list to meet your own needs. Prices were obtained at a local home center as a rough guideline, so employees can have some realistic sense of what to expect. They are for mid-quality, serviceable tools — you can always spend more.

A beginner can end up with everything on the list through the apprentice 2 level for a total cash outlay of less than \$2,300. Taken over the course of three years, that's roughly \$64 month, or about \$.40 an hour. (Gives you a whole new appreciation for those old tools, doesn't it?)

Tool Requirements

Helper: You'll need to have these tools in your possession when you show up for work every day. If you don't, I will assume you want to be a laborer or unemployed.

Hand Tools	Cost	Power Tools
Gloves	supplied	None required
Safety glasses	supplied	
Hearing protection	supplied	
Dust mask / respirator	supplied	
Nail belt (price varies widely)	\$60	
25' tape	\$16	
Framing hammer	\$30	
Torpedo level	\$8	
Speed square	\$7	
Carpenter's pencils (several)	\$1 each	
Chalk line	\$6	
Utility knife	\$6	
Nail sets	\$8	
3/4-inch wood chisel	\$9	
Dikes/end-cut pliers	\$17	
Cat's paw	\$10	
Approximate total cost	\$178	

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Another Way

I was once fortunate enough to work for an employer who paid everyone on the crew a tool allowance. There was a basic rate for those who showed up with the usual tools; if you brought air tools and a compressor to the job, you got more; if you were a lead who supplied tools for the crew, even more. As the allowance accumulated, we could bring in receipts and be reimbursed for tools we had bought. It seemed to work out well for everyone, because he had a well-equipped team, and every tool belonged to someone personally, so people tended to be more careful of them.



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Apprentice 1: To progress past the level of a helper, you'll need the following tools (in no particular order) and the ability to use them. You should start on this list within 90 days and have everything on it within about 18 months. How quickly you progress is up to you.

Hand Tools	Cost	Power Tools	Cost
Framing square	\$15	Circular saw	\$160
Combination square	\$8	Reciprocating saw	\$175
Wood chisel set, 1/4- to 1-inch	\$30	Finish sander	\$50
Extension cord	\$25	Cordless drill	\$175
Dry line	\$5		
Trim hammer	\$20		
Flat bar	\$10		
Wrecking bar	\$15		
Masonry chisel	\$12		
Handsaws (rip & crosscut)	\$20 each		
Screwdriver set	\$25		
Drill bit set with countersinks	\$30		
Bar clamps	\$10 each		
4' level	\$50		
2' level	\$30		
Vise grips	\$10		
10" adjustable wrench	\$15		
Tin snips	\$15		
Cold chisels	\$9		
Approximate total cost	\$344		\$560

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Apprentice 2: There's no limit to the number of tools you can buy, but this list will get you started in the right direction. If you're working on this over the course of your second and third year, we'll be okay.

Hand Tools	Cost	Power Tools	Cost
Molding bar (thin flat bar for trim removal)	\$9	Jigsaw	\$160
Coping saw	\$10	1/2-inch drill	\$100
Compass scribe	\$2	Router	\$150
Calculator (CM recommended, trig costs less)	\$80	Belt sander	\$180
Block plane	\$30		
Miter/bevel gauge	\$4		
Pointing trowel	\$10		
Hacksaw	\$10		
Allen wrench set	\$4		
Plumb bob	\$12		
Set of files (round, triangle, flat)	\$15		
Wood rasps or surform tools	\$6 each		
Putty knives	\$10 each		
Drywall knives	\$25 each		
Wallboard saw	\$5		
Scrapers	\$15 each		
3-pound sledge	\$25		
Concrete flatwork tools	\$50		
Pipe wrenches	\$13 each		
Water-pump pliers	\$12		
Propane torch	\$13		
Large C-clamp	\$10		
Spring clamps	\$5 each		
Pipe clamps	\$17 each		
100' tape	\$20		
PVC saw	\$15		
Close-quarters hacksaw	\$10		
Stapler	\$20		
8- to 10-pound sledgehammer	\$30		
Socket set	\$35		
Approximate total cost	\$522		\$590

Journeyman carpenter: At some point you will want to consider buying a compressor, a variety of pneumatic tools, a compound miter saw, a table saw, a hammer drill, a door planer, a chainsaw, an angle grinder, ladders, demolition tools, work lights, additional finish tools, and many other tools, depending on your interests. If you start showing up with these, and you know what you're doing with them, let's talk about what it will take to keep you out of the Yellow Pages as my competition.