

“The Impact of Migrant Workers on the American Workforce:
Opinions From a Local Business Owner”

By: Ava Strahan

These days, it is nearly impossible to turn on the television, read a newspaper, or go on the internet without encountering some sort of discussion about immigration in the United States. One specific aspect of this large-scale debate is the impact of immigrant workers, both legal and illegal, on the American workforce.

Within the debate, various industries are focused on due to the number of immigrants that hold or pursue jobs in the field. The construction industry is one of these highlighted professions that immigration is believed to have impacted over time.

Rob King, of R.B King Properties, is one professional within the construction industry who not only saw first-hand how immigration affected the workforce but also developed his own opinions on the issue.

While many critics argue that immigration and migrant workers have a negative effect on America’s businesses and workforce, King expresses his beliefs that these workers have “a necessary and mainly positive effect.”

“Migrant workers provide ample manpower in areas that most others don't want to work in...or aren't willing to work in because of the wages that American owned companies are willing to pay.”

With this statement, King also sheds light on another aspect of the debate about immigrant workers in the American workforce. It is also frequently argued that immigrants are taking jobs from blue-collar workers and driving down wages in the industry. Critics reason that migrant workers, both legal and illegal, are beating out Americans for many blue-collar jobs due to the fact that they are typically willing to work for less than what many consider acceptable.

However, Mr. King explains that the “notion that one group of people is hurting our economy because they are willing to work at bargain basement low price” is “narrow-minded.”

“I don't see very many Americans racing to interview for the kind of jobs immigrants are willing to perform at,” King states. “I have noticed a dramatic drop over the years in our American youth who are willing to learn a trade in the construction markets. How can we create housing without having willing participants to show up and perform their scope of work at a fair wage?”

Mr. King elaborates that the issue of lower wages goes beyond the increase of immigrants in the industry, suggesting that the economics of the business are to blame.

“Wages are not being driven down by the person who is willing to perform at a financial level lower than another person, due to their individual needs, as much as the business owner and/or the consumer who may insist on purchasing a product for the lowest price possible,” King states.

As a parting thought, Mr. King poses the question, “When [you] hear the term immigrant and/or migrant worker, what nationality or race comes to mind?” From here, he goes on to explain that no matter what you think of -- a Hispanic worker, a middle-eastern man or woman, an Indian

shop owner, etc. -- the answer to this question exposes a deeper rooted issue. King explains that this “may expose that we may not have as much of an immigration issue as we do a systemic issue and social issue, plagued with prejudice.”

“I feel that reform is necessary and improving how we handle the business of immigration is important,” he adds. “However, it is important to manage this issue with humanity and the understanding that most of us would not be here in this great country if it wasn't for our own immigrant family member that entered many generations ago.”

“If we can improve our policies, manage our issues with great discipline, and be able to set a high humanitarian tone, maybe we can be put this problem to rest one day soon.”