

# TileLetter

ON THE COVER:  
LATICRETE INTERNATIONAL

**MURAL PROJECT HONORS  
CALIFORNIA TOWN'S  
EVOLVING CULTURE**

Sinks, drains, and  
all things plumbing

The lack of  
**QUALIFIED  
MANAGEMENT**

is the biggest threat to the  
tile and stone industries



# THE LACK OF



## QUALIFIED MANAGEMENT is the biggest threat to the tile and stone industries



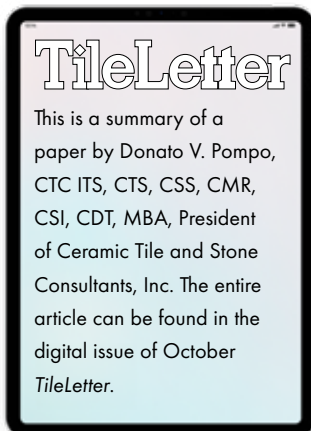
Donato V. Pompo, CTC ITS, CTS, CSS, CMR, CSI, CDT, MBA  
President of Ceramic Tile and Stone Consultants, Inc

### NTCA Executive Director Bart Bettiga introduces the piece:

“This article is being published with the consent and permission of Donato Pompo, with whom we have a long-term, professional relationship. Donato offers a unique perspective on providing potential solutions to what has long been considered an industry problem: the lack of qualified tile installers. Leaders within the NTCA have engaged in discussions regarding this article and commend its initiative to enhance awareness of the necessity for increased industry support for the efforts undertaken by our association, as well as others, like the CTEF.

“Over the past 20 years, NTCA has expanded its efforts with our resources to provide training throughout the country, with more than 3,000 installers reached by our team in 2024 alone!” He continues, “We also developed a Department of Labor-approved apprenticeship program with online and classroom curriculum, creating more opportunities for tile and flooring contractors to utilize our resources. NTCA staff also supports the CTEF with its time and energy, at no cost to the Foundation.

“As the saying goes, ‘It takes a village,’ and this is what our industry needs if we are going to grow the tile market,” he concluded. “NTCA encourages everyone in the tile industry to read Donato’s article and to join us in supporting our efforts as well as those of the Ceramic Tile Education Foundation.”  
– Bart Bettiga



## INDUSTRY PARTNER SPOTLIGHT



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**Problems: lack of skilled installers, lack of OTJ supervision**

Pompo noted that tile failures are becoming more common, as is litigation over bad tile jobs. But who really suffers are consumers who invest time, money and emotion in tile selection and end up with a poor-quality installation. Many of these customers don't have the resources for a forensics company or litigation to correct the problem.

When attempting to fix the installation, often the general contractor or installer will attempt to repair the symptoms of the failure without addressing the root cause, compounding the consumer's frustration. If it isn't fixed correctly, consumers wind up having to live with that unsatisfying job for years – and tell everyone they know about it. These installations are costly to the installation company in terms of out-of-pocket replacement costs for products and time investment, as well as to the reputation of the tile company and the black eye it gives tile and the industry.

For commercial jobs, bad workmanship has similar effects, though there is usually money for litigation that will involve architects, interior designers, engineers and general contractors whose work may have contributed to the problem. The result of failures is that large-scale projects are choosing alternative products instead of tile: poured floorings like terazzo, continuous plastic enclosures with prefab pans for showers, alternative exterior treatments for facades, balconies and pool decks. These failures are avoidable. Installers are capable of doing the work correctly. It is the management who needs to be educated in providing the oversight and OJT training for the installers in order to prevent failures.

With the average age of the tile installer being 40 years old, the shortage of installers – especially skilled labor – compounds the problem. The industry needs to



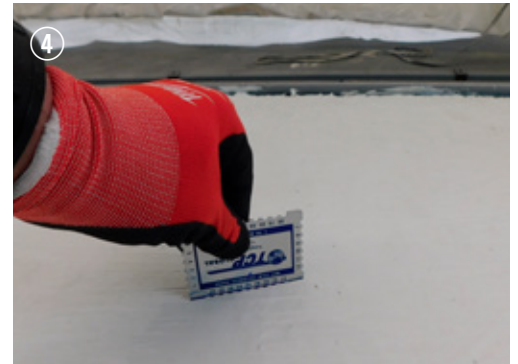
*Testing shear bond strength on a project.*

1) Having mentors and a foreman on site are essential for quality control of installer work.

2) Hiring and training project managers, supervisors and foremen helps ensure quality of work for the installation crews.

3) Installers need to perfect basic skills like proper troweling.

4) Installers should know how to check liquid membranes for appropriate mil thickness using a mil gauge.



recruit more installers, and attract high school students to the honorable, lucrative and rewarding profession of tile installation that has the added benefit of being an outlet for creativity. Skilled labor needs to be able to keep up with increased demand, market changes, and rapidly-evolving products, construction conditions and requirements. Many installers learn ad hoc on the job, don't have a consistent understanding of industry standards or an opportunity to learn without missing work. But tile installer training is an investment that benefits everyone in the industry, since failures affect everyone up and down the supply chain, impacting money, time, and reputation.

One of the issues that impacts installation excellence is the lack of full-time qualified and informed foremen and supervisors overseeing the work of installers, resulting in a disorganized and unsupervised installation process. Proper training of installation relies on a mentor or foreman correcting mistakes as they happen and instructing installers in the correct methods and techniques. But company management may "cheap-out" on these essential employees, mistakenly believing they can't be competitive if they invest money in foremen or supervisors. However, the "good enough" culture they are cultivating is rarely

EVER "good enough." Companies with a goal of quality work invest in the oversight personnel needed to ensure work is being done according to standards in a systematic manner, and they catch mistakes before they become costly callbacks.

### The solution

The solution is an overhaul to the way training is implemented in installation companies, starting with management learning how to utilize a Total Quality Management program at their company. This will include training programs for project managers, supervisors and foremen to implement appropriate quality standards, and access to convenient and affordable training for installers.

Other professions require continuing education programs, and tile installation should be no different. Plus, online training programs need to be available at convenient times – ideally 24/7 – and should include self-paced courses and webinars relevant to the occupation, type, and scope of work for the learner. The University of Ceramic Tile and Stone (UofCTS) and NTCA University offer courses of this type. CTEF also provides a range of courses as well as rigorous testing for those who wish to become Certified Tile Installers



(CTIs), but this requires a level of skill proficiency – as well as time and money to take the test – which leaves it out of reach for installers who only do thinset applications or use backer boards. Regardless of skill level, every tile installer needs training, and access to free and convenient education courses to teach basic standards and necessary quality control steps to prevent problems and result in a well-performing installation. This must be supported by project management personnel that oversee work to catch problems before they become failures.

If the industry does nothing to improve the way tile installations are done, it will continue a downhill slide with negative publicity, lost revenue and a ripple effect that will impact every sector of the industry. A paradigm shift is needed.

This is a call to action – industry stakeholders need to invest a collective sum of \$1 million or more annually to develop a robust online training platform available to the industry 24/7 to train management, installers, and be used as a recruitment tool for free education to high school students nationwide as part of their curriculum. Plus, it could also be useful in helping tile companies source helpers who have had basic exposure to installation methods, practices and standards.

To be successful, a full-time instructional designer will be necessary to create online courses as well as a full-time business development director promoting training and recruitment around the country. Major tile manufacturers – domestic and international – as well as major distributors and trade associations should recognize the need and value of this plan and pledge support.

If everyone donates a little, the industry can develop a powerful synergy to improve

the quality of tile installations and to recruit young, capable people into a great profession and a very healthy lifestyle, while perpetuating quality work and a good reputation and image for the industry. This will result in selling more tile and getting more work.

This is the time to take advantage of the employment trend of more young people showing interest in going into the trades, and prompt them to develop a sense of pride in their work. Being able to look back and say, “I did that” is a powerful driver and motivator. We must appreciate and respect how hard installing flooring is and recognize the installer for their accomplishments. None of them, new or old, want to do a bad job. If we keep them up to date, informed, engaged and make them part of the team, we can and will solve the installation shortage.

For more information, contact Donato Pompo at [donato@uofcts.org](mailto:donato@uofcts.org).

For the complete article, view the story in the October Digital issue of *TileLetter*. **TL**

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NTCA University and the University of Ceramic Tile and Stone have an online curriculum to support learning for industry professionals.



*The Ceramic Tile Education Foundation (CTEF) offers courses at a range of proficiency levels as well as the Certified Tile Installer (CTI) exam to test installers' basic skills.*



*NTCA Workshops and Regional Programs provide free or low cost training in many areas of the country to help installers improve their skills, reaching over 3,000 installers in 2024 alone!*