

# Competitive Edge

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For the past six years ComEd has helped countless employees in the construction industry achieve higher accomplishments through its Construct Program where participants go through an intensive track from project management and planning. The program is designed to increase the pool of qualified minority candidates for entry-level construction jobs in Illinois. This year, 108 students will graduate entering a workforce with several possibilities. This week, we spoke to four individuals who participated in the Construct Program who gave their input on how the program has transformed their lives.

## **Chelsea Simmons**

### **What circumstances were happening in your life that led you to ComEd's Construct program?**

I was jumping from job to job and decided I wanted a career, and a stable environment to grow professionally.

### **Talk to me about your experience in ComEd's Construct program? How do you feel it has transformed your career?**

I've always had an interest in the construction industry. The process of constructing a building fascinates me. This program helped me grow professionally, evolving into a better person. I have developed public speaking skills, which is great because now I am able to talk in front of a group of people, whereas before, I was terrified and couldn't do it at all.

### **What aspect of the program do you feel was most beneficial to you?**

The most beneficial to me has been the OSHA training, flagger certification training, and networking. I've never networked so much in my life. It has helped me learn how to sell myself, which I was never able to do at the beginning of the program. I would love to work for ComEd someday as a carpenter or heavy equipment operator.

### **Why, in your opinion, do you believe this type of program is helpful for those in the construction industry, especially for minority groups?**

Yes, very helpful. It is stressful and a lot of work. However, if you do not get a job in the construction industry at least you're certified. The program is a good vehicle to encourage more women into the program. It's empowering.

### **What would you like potential students to know about ComEd's Construct program?**

The program will change your life for the better. It's well worth it, especially if you are a minority or a female. It a great option to get your foot in the door and gain experience.

**Doris Romo**

**What circumstances were happening in your life that led you to ComEd's Construct program?**

The circumstances at the time of my life that led me to ComEd's Construct program was wanting a better life for my children and a lifelong career. Becoming a role model to my children and nieces and nephews as well.

**Talk to me about your experience in ComEd's Construct program? How do you feel it has transformed your career?**

My experience with the program has definitely been very informative and has opened my eyes to opportunities. It is also opening the door for minorities and women to work in the construction field. I always wanted to find out how to get into the construction industry and didn't know where to start. The Construct program gave me that opportunity.

What aspect of the program do you feel was most beneficial to you?

The most beneficial about the program was knowing that as a woman and minority I had a chance of getting into the construction field.

**Why, in your opinion, do you believe this type of program is helpful for those in the construction industry, especially for minority groups?**

I believe that this type of program is helpful for those pursuing the construction industry. It gives minorities more opportunities to grow and develop their careers. We are strong, talented people and today's population reflects that. Unfortunately, sometimes we are not given the opportunity to grow but at least through the Construct program we are. God made us different for a reason and we should all be proud no matter what the struggles are. Just find out what opportunities are out there and never give up.

**What would you like potential students to know about ComEd's Construct program?**

I would like potential students to know that the program definitely opens your career path to many opportunities, you simply have to do what it takes to walk in and make it happen. I feel that it's definitely worth your time.

**Damier Allison**

**What circumstances were happening in your life that led you to ComEd's Construct program?**

I was a senior in college in 2014 but was not able finish school so I began looking for a job. It took me 3 years to find one. In 2017 I got a job in sales for an insurance company, but it was commission only. That wasn't enough. I wanted something more but I didn't have enough experience to get a better job.

**Talk to me about your experience in ComEd's Construct program? How do you feel it has transformed your career?**

ComEd helps you create a 30-second elevator pitch, build your resume, and learn project management skills. I heard about ComEd in 2015 by my father who graduated at that time, so when they introduced the Project Management and Planning track this year he recommended I apply. It's a wonderful experience with so much learning within 9 weeks. The first 3 weeks you undergo math training in order to take a Math test that is actually a requirement for the job

interview process with ComEd. I dreaded math at first; luckily after 3 weeks I realized I became really good in problem-solving. When you're younger you are told that you are not smart if you can't solve a challenge, but in reality that's not true. If you are taught the right skills you can learn to solve anything. The next two weeks were Excel training, for which now I am proudly certified. I wouldn't have been to accomplish that if it weren't for the Construct program. We also polished our communications skills and performed public speaking every Friday while in front of different department heads giving presentations.

**What aspect of the program do you feel was most beneficial to you?**

The most beneficial aspect was being introduced to Shawn Hertzog, VP of Olenick and being able to have a regular one on one conversation where I could sell myself. It's wonderful that ComEd brings established companies and executives to network with us. They get to know who you are and what you have to offer. Someday, I'd love to work for ComEd for the call center or customer center.

**Why, in your opinion, do you believe this type of program is helpful for those in the construction industry, especially for minority groups?**

It gives minorities the opportunity to connect with people from different backgrounds and industries. Our project coordinators have backgrounds in the construction industry so they are great teachers and they create a teamwork environment that helps you succeed and grow.

**Dexter Allison**

**What circumstances were happening in your life that led you to ComEd's Construct program?**

I was working full-time, but there weren't any advancement opportunities. With ComEd's Construct program I felt it could lead me to build a career. I learned about the program through my dad who is a 2015 graduate and then went to orientation at the Chicago Urban League. Talk to me about your experience in ComEd's Construct program? How do you feel it has transformed your career?

It's been a tremendous and wonderful experience. I've expanded my personal and professional experience. I gained confidence with public speaking, become more assertive with interview techniques and interacting with businesses. I've also enjoyed gaining excel training, customer service training, and going to job fairs to see what companies are looking for.

**What aspect of the program do you feel was most beneficial to you?**

Being able to meet one on one with people from big companies. We've met CEOs of companies like INTREN and Olenick, interacting with them and learning the skills and requirements they are looking for. You build relationships with people you don't necessarily meet every day.

**Why, in your opinion, do you believe this type of program is helpful for those in the construction industry, especially for minority groups?**

Absolutely. You get tons of opportunities to meet with presidents and senior executives and companies that otherwise you wouldn't have access to, which is beneficial for your career growth.

**What would you like potential students to know about ComEd's Construct program?**

I would say be open-minded. Sometimes you might encounter boring tasks, but take pride in it, show interest, and be consistent every day. Every person you come across could be an opportunity. Take the program seriously. It pays off. They will put in a good word for you when they see the hard work you put in. I just finished an application for IT training academy for the company Olenick. I am job shadowing with them tomorrow. I will get a hands on experience day to day operations, the company culture, and the programs they use. I am excited and I hope they hire me.