

The Young Brickmakers

“Thus there arose a new skilled trade known as brickmaking, called junior scientist... This new arrangement was very efficient and the construction... proceeded with great vigor.”

- Bernard K. Forscher, 1963

In 1963, Forscher lamented the loss of builders in a sea of brickmakers and the inability to “maintain the distinction between a pile of bricks and a true edifice” (1). In 2020, the situation had worsened: “Everywhere were scattered piles of bricks” (2).

Indeed, with the arrival of the year 2020, builders were a rarer species, and edifices could barely be recognized beneath the “avalanche of bricks” (1). Despite this, there were still plenty of young brickmakers grappling for the opportunity to enter into the craft and to train under well-renowned builders.

A rather idealistic group, the young brickmakers did not enter into the brickmaking business to simply produce heaps of bricks. Rather, they were inspired by visions of edifices. Still, at the beginning, the young brickmakers were content to learn the art of making bricks, recognizing the need to build their skills. They diligently produced bricks under the supervision of their mentors, all the while maintaining their visions of the edifices that they would one day construct.

But as their educations continued, the young brickmakers found themselves shaped by the forces of brickyard activities. They were told, often implicitly, to abandon the slow, arduous, possibly thankless work of building edifices, and replace it with the much simpler task of producing and storing bricks. The often overworked young brickmakers eventually learned that their future livelihoods and reputations depended on the number of bricks produced and if they could store those bricks in the best, shiniest storage locations.

This created a difficult and sometimes confusing

environment for the young brickmakers, and, in many cases, caused their visions of edifices to fade. Even the more “adventurous” (1) young brickmakers sometimes grew tired and fell into the comfortable rhythm of brick production. Others became disillusioned and abandoned the brickyard entirely.

Yet the year of the pandemic also provided an opportunity for reflection across the brickyard, though the circumstances were unexpected and painful. As they were forced to consider what was really important about their craft, some brickmakers were reminded of their youthful aspirations of edifices. In turn, brickmakers young and old realized that the brickyard did not need to carry on the way that had been, but that they had a chance to forge a new kind of brickyard. They began to envision systems that rewarded thoughtful plans for edifices above quantity of bricks. They welcomed people who had previously been excluded into the brickyard.

Though the transformation was slow, many young brickmakers were empowered to become builders and could not easily be discouraged. This group was committed to the deliberate, sometimes tiring work of creating high-quality bricks with the blueprint of an edifice in mind. They pursued thoughtful conversations and collaborations, so that rather than ignoring the bricks from other parts of the brickyard, they began to clean up the avalanche. In this way, new, grander edifices that could hardly have been imagined before began to rise, and, ever so slowly, the brickyard became less chaotic.

Kelsea B. Best

Ph.D. Candidate, Department of Earth and Environmental Sciences, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, Tennessee 37240 USA
Email: kelsea.b.best@vanderbilt.edu

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