



2017 TFG
Conference

Getting Better at Getting Better

Tedd Benson, Kevin Bittenbender, & Andrew Dey

Bensonwood/Unity Homes

Walpole, NH

When compared with conventional, code-built homes, the builders of high-performance homes are at an economic disadvantage right out of the gate. These homes tend to cost more because builders use high-quality materials and craft them into complex assemblies that require uncommon care, knowledge, and precision to execute successfully.

In order to increase competitiveness in the marketplace, therefore, it's essential that inefficiency and waste in the building process be minimized. Towards that goal, we need to be better in every way, achieving both a higher quality product and a more streamlined process. One methodology that our companies have found to be particularly effective is Lean thinking.

In this session, we will present a brief history of Lean thinking and its application to the construction industry; a number of "real world" examples of implementing Lean in our shop, our office, and on-site; and a look at the challenges of establishing and strengthening a culture of continuous improvement.

About the Speakers

Tedd Benson (lead presenter)

Tedd Benson, the founder and President of Bensonwood (1973) and Unity Homes (2012), has devoted his life to developing a better way to build. A key figure in the revival of timber framing in America, Mr. Benson was a founder of the Timber Framers Guild (1984) and is author of four books on the subject. Bensonwood was launched with the mission to demonstrate how we can effectively build quality, lasting, and sustainable homes by embedding the process with disciplined craftsmanship, along with advanced technology, software, and manufacturing efficiency. After having spent time researching in Europe and Asia, he went on to found Unity Homes, coupling an innovative system of standardization with lean, quality, off-site construction, to make high performance homes affordable and normal. Mr. Benson is a nationally known speaker and presenter, and is the recipient of many awards, including an honorary doctorate from Unity College, and most recently, The Granite State Award, in recognition of his statewide and national influence on best building practices.

Kevin Bittenbender (co-presenter)

Kevin Bittenbender is Company Steward and Head of Production at Bensonwood. After studying economics at Middlebury College and spending a few years as a carpenter, he joined Bensonwood. Passionate about working efficiently, Mr. Bittenbender has been actively incorporating Lean principles and practices into Bensonwood's operations. From organizing training and facilitating events, to helping incorporate improvements on the shop floor, he has played an active role in pushing Lean forward in the constant challenge of reducing waste wherever possible. Along with being the Lean champion for Bensonwood, he is also the team leader for the Woodworking department and a Company Steward.

Andrew Dey (co-presenter)

Andrew Dey is Operations Steward for Unity Homes. Unity Homes has had several "repeat clients" - homeowners for whom Bensonwood built years ago, and who returned to have a new home built by Unity. Mr. Dey is Unity's first "repeat employee." After graduating from Harvard, he worked as a contractor in Boston before joining Bensonwood in the mid-nineties. For thirteen years Mr. Dey provided leadership to the project management department and, as a company steward, to Bensonwood as a whole. After an eight-year hiatus during which he honed his building science, project management and leadership skills (and spent a year in Germany researching energy-efficient homebuilding), Mr. Dey returned to join the Unity Homes team where he wrangles day-to-day operations at the company.