

HOW TO BE MORE EFFICIENT WITH YOUR TOOL BELT



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The Importance of Having a Tool Belt

You may have noticed nearly all contractors wear a tool belt and it isn't for style, but good reasons. This document should inform you why to use a toolbelt, and some tips to optimize it.

Increase Your Speed

The main reason to have a tool belt is to increase your productivity while working. Having a tool belt allows you to carry more tools, materials, fasteners, and other items on you rather than by hand.

Instead of having to make multiple trips or forget tools, you will have them within grabbing distance at all times. Picking up a tool off the ground may not seem like a huge waste of time, but over time those seconds compound and can have a large impact on the amount of work you can do when they are right at your hips.

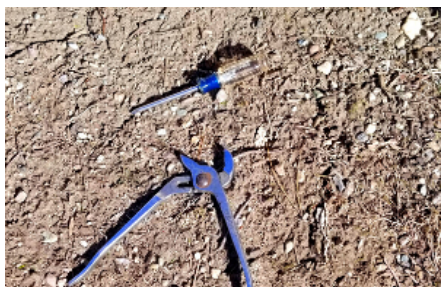




The Importance of Having a Tool Belt

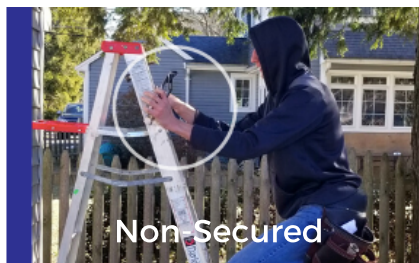
Protect Your Tools

Your tools are what enables you to do your work, and can be an expensive investment. Having a tool belt allows you to keep them protected on your side where you know exactly what they experience. Dirt and debris can destroy tools if they are left on the ground, so a tool belt prevents this from happening. Also, leaving them on the ground makes them easier to be lost or stolen.



Increases Your Safety

Ladders are one of the most dangerous things on a job site, and account for over 150,000 emergency room visits per year in the US alone! Therefore, you will want all your hands and mental abilities focused on climbing. Holding other tools should not take place while climbing, and a tool belt gives you free hands and full mobility.





The Different Types of Tool Belts

There are hundreds of styles for all uses and prices, but we boil them down here.

The Common Types

The most common type is a **one-piece** that is meant to be worn on the front or back. It is more affordable and isn't optimized for professional use, but for many people, it's the right choice because of the price and convenience it provides.

Next are **pouches** and are what most professionals use. They are customizable and can be arranged on a belt to one's liking. They are kept on one's side keeping them in range, but out of the way.

Aprons are another type that is less common in carpentry and is mostly used by mechanics or welders. These provide some storage for tools, but also protection against debris like sparks, dirt, and more. They don't hold as many tools, but if you want protection then a tool apron may be a good idea.



1 Piece



Pouches



Apron

Pants with lots of pockets may work initially for some, but are not a sustainable solution for large projects



The Different Types of Tool Belts

Types of Materials

Most traditional tool belts are made of leather but now some are made of nylon. Leather is a great choice for many as it is durable, comfortable, and conforms nicely after being broken in. There are various qualities of leather ranging from cheapest to most expensive and durable: **suede** → **oil tanned** → **top grain**.

Expect thicker leather from oil-tanned or top grain, but also be ready to pay the premium for the expensive leather. Nylon is a new choice for many people as they are now rivaling leather in their strength, yet in a lighter package.

Material is a personal choice that should be based on cost, and durability. In tool belts as with most things, you receive what you pay for, and depending on your line of work a higher initial investment may make sense for its longevity



Pictured left to right: Oil tanned, Nylon, Suede, Canvas



The Different Types of Tool Belts

How to Distribute the Weight

Depending on your tool belt, and what work you are doing will affect how you distribute its weight. For a one-piece or tool pouches, if you are just working for a short time without much weight, then the belt itself around your waist is likely to be fine.

However, if it gets loaded heavier or you need it for a long time then you should consider suspenders to take some weight off your hips and onto your shoulders.

For aprons, they generally don't hold much weight on them but knows that it will be held around your neck which is not as strong as your waist or shoulders. Typically, starting with the product itself is fine, and as you work and notice parts of your body getting fatigued can make sense to purchase suspenders or something else.



Although you may not feel you need suspenders when young, your older body will thank you for taking care of yourself better.



Optimizing Your Tool Belt

After you obtain your tool belt, you will need to learn to use it efficiently.

Left VS Right Hand Tools

It may seem that once you get your tool belt you can just throw your tools in and hope they are organized and efficient. However, that is far from the truth, and certain tools are more effective in different areas than others. **Right versus left-hand tools**, for instance, make a large difference in one's ability to quickly grab and use tools. A hammer and marking device, for example, is going to be on the dominant side (usually right) for one-hand access. You would not want to cross your body each time, so think about what hand you use your tools. Tape measures and speed squares, on the other hand, are secondary tools that can be used in conjunction with a pencil and should be on the nondominant side for easy use. Fasteners generally go on the non-dominant side so that you can continue to hold your hammer, while getting the fasteners you need with one hand. Spending some time dividing your tools into what hand is needed for them can lead to more efficiency when working.

Non-Dominant Hand



Dominant Hand





Optimizing Your Tool Belt

Wearing it on your Front, Back, or Sides:

Once you have your tool belt, you will need to determine how you wear it. If it is a tool apron, then it is simple and will be the front. If you have a one-piece tool belt then you have the option of front or back. For beginners who aren't going to develop muscle memory, the front can be helpful. However, if you use it more often then placing it on your back out of the way is best as you will quickly learn where the tools belong and it will be better out of the way than the front.



Front



Back

Pouches, on the other hand, are the most versatile as they can be on the front, back, or most commonly on the sides. Your sides are closer to the front than the back, yet are still out of the way providing good mobility, and don't hinder your ability to bend forwards. Most contractors and professionals have their tool pouches here and for good reasons. Efficiency and mobility again is the big factor, so sides are the clear winner for pouches.

Don't feel pressure to copy others when working, but focus on your own groove



Optimizing Your Tool Belt



Staying Safe with a Tool Belt:

As mentioned ladders are notoriously dangerous to workers, and a tool belt can prevent that. However, just throwing it on is not enough, as a hammer or screwdriver on your back can be even more dangerous. Instead, when climbing rotate your tool belt to the front or sides to remain safe in the event of a fall. It only takes a second, and can be the difference between life or death in the event of a slip. Starting early to develop the muscle memory and habit is beneficial, and is recommended to all workers regardless of experience or height.



It only takes a second, so rotate your belt when climbing!



Conclusion

Consider Your Line of Work and Talk to Others

With tool belts, there is no one size fits all as there are many types of use cases. From framing, masonry, to finish work, and much more, the jobs all have different requirements, tools, and accordingly tool belt setups.

When you know what work you will be doing, it can be very helpful to talk to others who have experience in that field and hear their preferences. Everyone starts as a beginner, but by talking to those who have done what you are going to do longer you can jump-start your learning. Oftentimes your best learning will be on the job site from doing or talking to others.



The elders aren't called elders for no reason- its because they have more experience than you and are a good resource to utilize.



Conclusion

Make it Personal

Ultimately, your tool belt is your tool belt. It is you alone who will be using the tools, building, and more. Despite common layouts, people have different dominant hands and movement patterns that enable them to optimize their tool belts differently. Talking to others and reading about your profession can give you a good start, but through trial and error, you may learn best.

Start out by placing your tool on the correct dominant hand side, and where others recommend it. Then as you work more refine down your movement patterns to keep your most-used tools on their proper side- closer or farther depending on frequency of it. Eventually, once you figure it out and muscle memory starts to kick in that layout may be able to work for a lifetime requiring only some minor conscious effort near the beginning.





Conclusion

What's Next?

Get working! The best learning you can do is by doing, and only by using your tools and understanding your body will you find your optimal location for your tool belt.



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