



Selecting the right construction manager is crucial to your project

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With the fire at the former Deutsche Bank on the front page of New York newspapers, the construction industry - and my part of that industry, construction management, in particular - has certainly gotten a black eye. It is easy to understand why property owners might think that hiring an independent construction manager is more trouble than it's worth; however, that tragic situation actually puts into sharp focus how essential having the right consultant to manage your construction project is. An experienced construction manager is the owner's eyes and ears, budget and scheduling guru, negotiator, buyer, and objective observer, keeping the "ship on course" even through rough seas. Beyond the necessity of having a construction manager, selecting the right one is crucial and requires asking hard questions, such as those below.

Do you take the time to become personally involved with the subs? The answer to this question is very revealing, as a construction manager's desire to get things done quickly often leads to cutting corners and making assumptions, like the subs will be diligent in protecting their own employees' safety and the safety of others. In contrast, I have seen again and again that the time taken to become personally involved with subs pays off in many ways. Not only are construction managers who take the time to understand how each sub operates prepared to deal with any number of issues down the road, safety being just one of them, but also that personal involvement gives the subs a very strong message: "I'm on top of every detail of the job, and I expect that same attention to detail from you."

Do you take extra time to understand every detail of the job? Many construction managers will profess to save time (i.e. money) by jumping into the job quickly, assuming that they know what is needed. A conscientious construction manager, however, never assumes anything and knows that being totally informed at the outset saves countless problems later on. To set the project off on a sound course, the manager must be focused at the project kick-off meeting on helping clients to detail and delineate their goals, listening very carefully, guiding the development of the scope-of-work, and asking what some may consider endless questions. I also believe in the tremendous benefit of spending extra time with each individual sub, not just developing the personal involvement I mentioned before but also getting very specific details on labor, materials, lead times, rental costs, required sequences, and potential problems. With this information, the construction manager is prepared to coordinate every work element, foresee areas that will require flexibility, and develop a project timeline and budget. Any extra time taken at the beginning assures the smooth running of the project, which ultimately saves money.

Do you take the time to communicate with your team? Every construction manager will tell you how important communication is, but probe more deeply to see what that actually entails. Managing a project, whether small or large, whether with two subs or a dozen, means keeping it moving effectively and efficiently. To ensure this, I find that team meetings are essential at a minimum of once a week and sometimes more often. My rule of thumb is that all key players need all the information that will keep them on target all the time. Successful managers know which details must be communicated to which subs, and they take the time to get that information to those who need it. I keep coming back to how important spending that extra time is. My experience has convinced me that doing things right takes not only expertise but also patience, personal investment, careful listening, constant questioning, and time. Cutting corners invariably leads to expending more time later, when the unforeseen occurs. My version of the old cliché is: a minute of prevention is worth an hour of cure.

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