

CONSULTANTS AND CONTRACTORS:

TEAMWORK

By William F. Hale, RRC, RRO

We live in a time when there are so many experts involved in our work – doctors, lawyers, architects, engineers, roof consultants, roof inspectors – and, yes, even roofing contractors. There are many more experts than I have room to list in this writing. *The American Heritage Dictionary*, second edition, defines an expert as, “A person with a high degree of skill in or knowledge of a certain subject.” There are other definitions, of course – some of them unique to the individual invoking the term. Each person working as an expert in our field of work is guided and influenced by his or her personality and life experience. An understanding, empathy, and respect for this individual dynamic are essential in forming a team.

I have worked in this industry since the summer of 1975, when, as a rising junior in high school, I loaded the roofs with shingles and assisted the real roofers. At that young and mal-

leable age, I was exposed to situations that made me question things. Throughout my career, I have worked as a contractor or an independent consultant on a wide variety of jobs. I have run a crew in the extremes of winter and summer. I have stayed on the roof through high winds and thunderstorms trying to protect the best interests of my company and customer. I have won design awards and conducted quality assurance inspections that gained me a reputation for expecting the best. I have been a peacemaker and caused trouble all in the same day. I am like most of us, whatever role we play in the equation, trying to do the best we can. The following stories and recommendations for peace in the valley may help us reduce the stress and friction associated with different experts in the industry of roofing.

THE PRE-BID

We had just finished a long and exhausting pre-bid on a middle school re-roofing project. The company architect and I were sitting in a restaurant discussing the meeting. The conversation revolved around our surprise and disdain for the questions several contractors had asked about the existing conditions. Why could they not understand that we could not see what the existing detailing was at the gravel stop, below the membrane? Could they not understand that the amount of saturated perlite was not detectable at the time of our design survey? Why were they being so unreasonable? It appeared to both of us that a couple of them were trying to make us look bad in front of our client. Let's just say the entire meeting left a bad taste in our mouth. So did our slow, cold lunch.

Recommendations:

Contractors: Be gentle and kind in the way you ask questions of a consultant. Treat a consultant with the same respect as you would have them treat you. Do not ask questions if it is obvious the consultant will not be able to provide the answer. Present questions to the consultant in writing to allow him to take the questions under advisement. Most questions can be answered in a very professional manner following a pre-bid with a pre-bid minutes addenda. Above all else, please, don't be a smart__.

Consultants: Respect the contractor's right to the information. After all, the contractor is taking a lot of risk. During the design survey, do everything you can to make sure you have



Sketch courtesy K. Stancil,
Baker Roofing

the day. I knew how to read the drawings and the manufacturer's manual. I knew nothing about how to deal with a "mountain man" roofer. I was assigned a project at a major university. The job was new construction. The roof system was a ballasted EPDM over expanded polystyrene insulation over a poured concrete deck.

The first day on the job, I noticed that every question I asked seemed to irritate the foreman more and more. Toward the end of the day, I made an alarming discovery. The four-inch-thick insulation was evaporating under the seams. I immediately made the assumption (oops!) that the roofers had not followed good practices while I was at lunch. I somehow let my thoughts be known when discussing my discovery and displeasure with the big, strong, burley foreman. Immediately, I was informed to get my scrawny, little, arrogant bottom side off his job or he was going to pick me up and throw me off. I wasn't very wise at 22, but I was smart enough to get down the ladder as fast as safely possible.

Recommendations:

Contractors: Please try to hire and promote people to the position of foreman or supervisor who are mentally stable and won't threaten bodily harm. Train your people to work well with consultants and inspectors. They are here to stay. Promote an attitude of cooperation by setting an example for the men who work in the field. Treat your employees with the respect they deserve for doing the physically demanding work they do each day. Practice the three Rs with your roofers: repeated reward and recognition. They can keep your crews soaring. Hopefully, having happy, successful workers will help keep consultants from taking a flight of their own.

Consultants: Ask questions of the roofing crew leaders in a thoughtful and respectful manner. When problems are detected (real or imagined), carefully consider if engaging in direct discussion is the best course of action. Often, reporting to the designer of record or the top dog at the roofing company is the best choice. Always get all the facts before you draw any conclusions. Always give the contractor the opportunity to correct a problem before

making a big issue of it. Do not approach the project expecting that the roofer is going to try and cut corners. Keep in mind the guys on the roof are the Marines of the building industry and deserve your respect every day.

CONCLUSION

If contractors and consultants can approach each project with a fresh and positive outlook, they will at least have a chance of forming a winning team.

The stories in this article are partially based on real life experience. The roofing business will never be a boring place to work. ■

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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