

# Do Roofing Contractors Respect Consultants?

## HOW TO ASSURE CONSULTANCY WILL FLOURISH

By Dave Harrison



**A**s a kid, I grew up in Boston, so I talked with my friends a lot about how we hated the New York Yankees. It was an awkwardly enjoyable, though questionably productive feud. But it wasn't an option – it was our obligation as Red Sox fans. “Our truth: Yankees have no morals; Yankee strategies are, at their root, corrupt; Yankees are ruining baseball.” But the reality: deep down, we always had tremendous respect for the Yankees and knew that the game thrived on such rivalry.

Fast forward. Now as an adult, I am privileged to serve in the roofing industry. For the first several years in the industry, I shared a lot of time with hundreds of people involved with professionally managed roofing contracting firms. I heard a lot about the roles and responsibilities of roof consultants from many contractors and the dreadful pain consultants often cause that “if not stopped, might ruin our industry.”

But over the past few years, I've shared a lot of time with a few hundred of the most prominent roof consultants in North America, and now I also hear about the roles and responsibilities of professional roofing contractors. I hear from them that the roofing contractor market is “overwhelmed with convicts and scam artists.”

So, I have developed some questions. First, what insights about one another can be learned from contractors and consultants that might actually benefit our industry? Second, does our industry actually “enjoy” a feud and relationship similar to Yankee and Red Sox fans who are “programmed” to say they dislike each other, but do have respect for and actually know each

### HOW SHOULD PROPERTY OWNERS CHOOSE A ROOF CONSULTANT?

	Consultant Response	Contractor Response	Index
Years Of Experience	49%	47%	4%
Credentials, Certifications	18%	20%	(9%)
Client List - Projects	16%	7%	128%

Table 1

### HOW SHOULD PROPERTY OWNERS CHOOSE A ROOFING CONTRACTOR?

	Consultant Response	Contractor Response	Index
Years Of Experience	54%	63%	(14%)
Credentials, Certifications	15%	20%	(25%)
Client List - Projects	23%	17%	35%

Table 2

is good for the other? Or, are these feelings ones of real and mutual disgust? Third, how can the relationships be improved?

Fortunately, Rick Damato, editor for *Roofing Contractor* and Kristen Ammerman, publications director for the Roof Consultants Institute, thought these questions were interesting too. They helped to sponsor this study, inviting 906 consultant readers of *Interface* to participate (342, or 39% responded). Also invited to participate were 1,500 readers of *Roofing Contractor* (286 or 19% responded). This article shares the results, analysis, and some considerations to strengthen one's consulting business and to benefit the industry.

### How Should a Property Owner Choose a Professional?

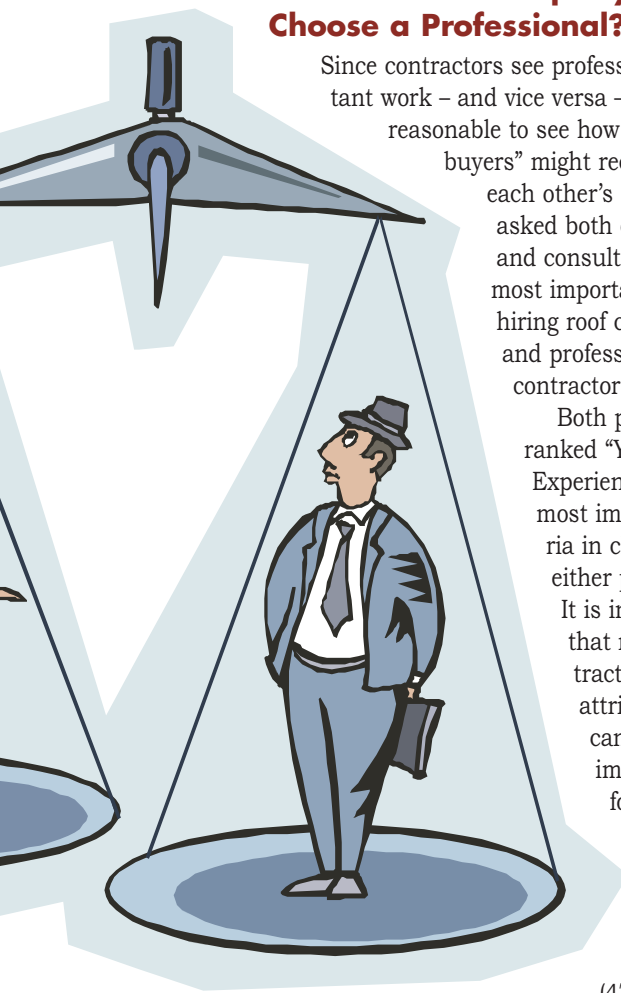
Since contractors see professional consultant work – and vice versa – it seems reasonable to see how “educated buyers” might recommend each other's services. We asked both contractors and consultants for the most important factors in hiring roof consultants and professional roofing contractors.

Both professions ranked “Years of Experience” as the most important criteria in choosing either professional. It is interesting that roofing contractors rank this attribute significantly more important (63%) for choosing a contractor versus choosing a roof consultant (47%). See

*Tables 1 and 2.*

For choosing a consultant, both contractors and consultants stated “Credentials and Certifications” were the second most important criteria (20% and 18% respectively). Consultants, however, ranked “Client List of Completed Projects” as third (16%) while contractors rated it third, but only with 7%.

For choosing a contractor, the professions were split on the second and third most important criteria. Consultants thought “Client List of Completed Projects” was second most important (23%) and contractors rated this third (17%). Consultants ranked “Credentials and Certifications” third (15%) while contractors were 25% less likely to rank these criteria as important.



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## BELIEFS RELATED TO TRUST

	<b>Very Much Agree (Consultant/ Contractor)</b>	<b>Very Much Disagree (Consultant/ Contractor)</b>	<b>Agree Overall (Consultant/ Contractor)</b>
Contractors/Consultants are "In Bed" w/ Specific Mfr.	29%/37%	31%/37%	69%/63%
Contractors Approve When Designs Exceed Mfr.'s Requirements	39%/50%	30%/13%	70%/87%
Contractors Go to Owner w/ Problems Before Consultant	24%/75%	42%/5%	58%/95%

Table 3

## OVERALL CONSULTANT PERCEPTIONS ABOUT CONTRACTORS

<b>Belief</b>	<b>Very Much Agree</b>	<b>Very Much Disagree</b>	<b>Agree Overall</b>
Just Want To Get Paid/Next Job	53%	11%	89%
Provide 24-hour Service	34%	29%	71%
Provide Timely Requirements	18%	49%	51%
Excellent After Project Service	13%	53%	47%
Use Consultant Observer as Mgt. Tool	31%	48%	52%
Appreciate Value of Consultant	39%	17%	83%

Table 4

### Agree To Disagree?

If you want to hear a complaint about another professional, ask if they are "in bed with" a specific manufacturer, and therefore the accusation they are being excluded, prices are inflated, and the property owner is being brutalized. Interestingly, the data suggest that this belief is widely held by each profession about the other. Consultants have relatively strong agreement (29%) and 69% general agreement that "most contractors 'are in bed' with a specific manufacturer" and the same is felt by contractors concerning consultants (37% strong agreement; 63% overall agreement.) See Table 3.

There are two significant "gaps" in perception between the contractors and roof consultants. First, roof consultants strongly disagree that contractors generally approve their specifications when they exceed manufacturers' requirements (30%), while contractors believe that they do approve consultants' specifications that exceed manufacturer specifications (87%). Second, contractors believe that they go to consultants with problems prior to approaching property owners (95%), while consultants very much disagree (42%).

### Consultants Want More From Contractors

Overall (89%), consultants believe that most contractors just want to get paid and onto the next job. While 71% believe contractors offer 24-hour emergency service, they appear less than satisfied (53%) with after-project service. See Table 4.



## OVERALL CONTRACTOR PERCEPTIONS ABOUT CONSULTANTS

<b>Belief</b>	<b>Very Much Agree</b>	<b>Very Much Disagree</b>	<b>Agree Overall</b>
Purposely Finds Fault - Prove Value	37%	31%	69%
Roof Knowledge Outdated	23%	34%	64%
Jobs Using Consultants - Higher Priced	59%	6%	94%
Helps Justify Change Orders	38%	30%	70%
Generally Fair	41%	8%	92%

Table 5

Roof consultants perceive that their job site observers are underutilized (48%) by contractors. It is likely positive for the industry that 83% of consultants believe that in general, roofing contractors appreciate the value that consultants provide to projects.

### **Contractors Have Mixed Feelings About Consultants**

Most contractors (69%) believe that the typical consultant will purposely find fault with a roofing contractor in order to demonstrate his or her value to the client property owner; 37% of contractors “very much” believe this to be true. Further, 64% of contractors perceive that the typical consultant’s knowledge is outdated. Almost all contractors (94%) agree that projects using consultants will result in a higher price to the property owner. See *Table 5*.

Contractors feel positively about consultants’ effect on change orders. Most (70%) believe that consultants help justify change orders getting approved. Most importantly, contractors (92%) believe that most roof consultants are fair.

### **Big Picture - How Do We Really Feel?**

It’s one thing to ask about “typical” perceptions. But asking about “last” experience often obtains the most accurate reflections of relationships and true beliefs.

The “last” or most recent experiences between roof consultants and roofing contractors demonstrate that in general, relationships are okay – with room for improvement.

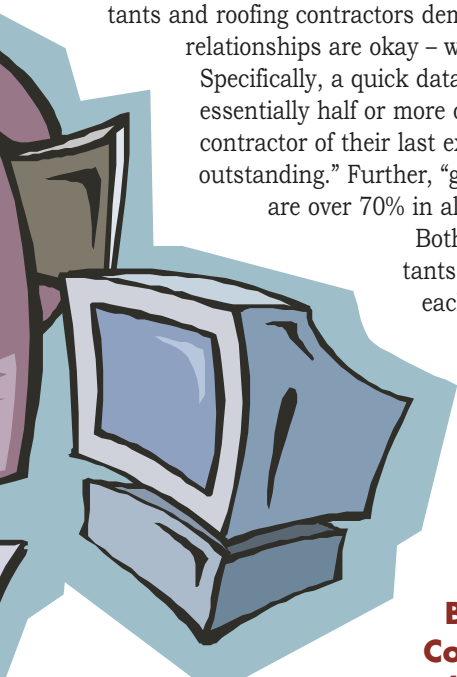
Specifically, a quick data scan of *Table 6* shows that essentially half or more of the consultants rated the contractor of their last experience as “very good to outstanding.” Further, “good to outstanding” ratings are over 70% in all cases.

Both contractors and consultants are most frustrated with each other when asked about “timeliness,” with only 71% of consultants and 76% of contractors satisfied with their last experience. Also, only 72% of contractors were satisfied with change orders in their last experience.

### **Bottom Line - Contractors Claim Consultants Add Value**

Business is pretty simple – when there is significant value added, issues at the detail level tend to work their way out. Clearly, contractors conceded in the privacy of this direct mail market research study that consultants do, in fact, add value. The strength of this perception of consultants’ worth is overwhelming in both “strength” of belief (“very much agree”) and overall agreement. See *Table 7*.

Specifically, 89% of contractors believe that having a consultant on the job results in the project requirements being more clearly defined. The majority of contractors (87%) believe



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## YOUR LAST EXPERIENCE?

	Very Good To Outstanding		Good to Outstanding	
	Consultant Rating Contractor	Contractor Rating Consultant	Consultant Rating Contractor	Contractor Rating Consultant
Attention To Details Specs	62%	54%	82%	87%
Change Orders	59%	44%	87%	72%
Crew Management	50%	N/A	79%	N/A
Inspections	55%	67%	88%	91%
Punch Lists/Follow Up	54%	43%	79%	86%
Timeliness	48%	33%	71%	76%
Communication	N/A	56%	N/A	84%

Table 6

## CONTRACTORS EVALUATE CONSULTANT VALUE

Belief	Very Much Agree	Very Much Disagree	Agree Overall
Makes Projects More Clearly Defined	53%	11%	89%
Assures Requirements Enforced	47%	13%	87%
Specs Useful and Practical	39%	18%	82%
Better Specs Than from Architects	45%	24%	76%
Increases the Quality of the Job	35%	34%	66%
Adds Value For Building Owner	38%	17%	83%
Observer Enhances Overall Project	62%	5%	95%

Table 7

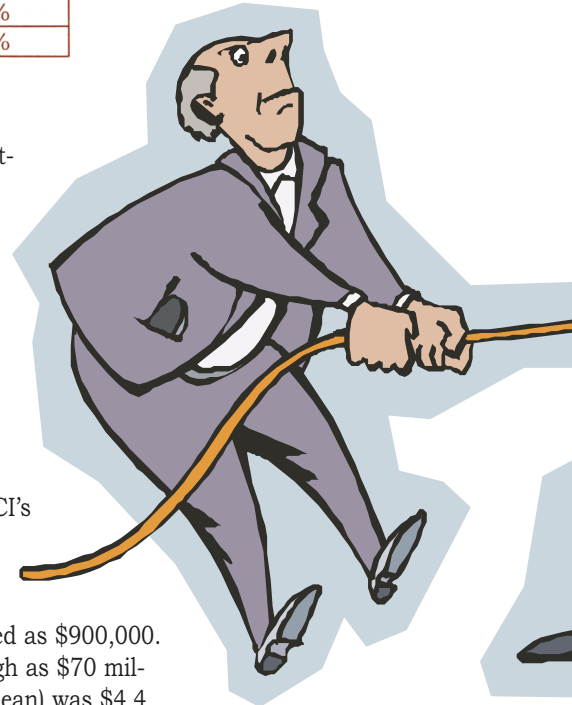
that project requirements are more uniformly and consistently enforced when consultants are utilized. They believe (82%) that specifications provided by consultants are useful and practical. The preponderance of contractors (76%) claimed that design specifications from consultants are better than design specifications from architects. The majority (66%) judges that jobs using consultants increase the job quality. And, almost all contractors (95%) believe that jobs utilizing consultant observers enhance the overall project.

However, there is one judgment of contractors that is most important... 83% believe: "Consultants add value to the project for the property owner." That's the bottom line. That's overall respect. This suggests that contractors and consultants will continue to have an evolving relationship of mutual dependency, if we are to build an even healthier industry of which we can all be proud.

## What Are The Demographics?

Listening to the stereotypes, one sometimes get the picture

that most roof consulting is performed by companies with one- to two-person offices with gross revenues of under \$150,000 per year. If you've heard that stereotype, throw away that myth. This survey received a 39% response rate from RCI's professional membership, and the "typical" (median) revenues were reported as \$900,000. The range went as high as \$70 million. The "average" (mean) was \$4.4 million. See Table 8.



## TYPICAL CONSULTANT BUSINESS PRACTICE

Business Type	
Roofing	68%
Waterproofing	9%
Other Building Envelope	12%
Parking Lots	2%
Misc.	9%
Total	100%
Revenues	\$ 900,000
Mix	Public: 39% / Private: 61%
Type Work	Design: 57% / Quality Assurance: 43%

Table 8

For roofing contractors, the typical firm in this study had revenues of \$1 million and 12 employees. The mean (average) was \$4.1 million, with 30 employees. The range was up to \$300 million. See Table 9.

The technologies used in the primary workloads of the participating contractors and consultants in this study are shown in Table 10.

## So, Is There A Feud?

So, what did I take away from all of this? First, this industry does “enjoy” a Boston Red Sox vs. New York Yankees type of rivalry between roofing contractors and consultants. There is cultural programming to spew foul generalizations of each other’s effects on the industry – and there is buried but deep mutual respect and interdependency that is likely to continue become even more vital in future years.

Why? When there is acceptance that overall value is generated, and it is at the tactical level where issues are significant, these problems are, in their essence, annoyances. Capitalistic economics dictates that these issues will be resolved. Big picture: as consolidation and sophistication of property owners continues to increase, the interdependence of consulting and contracting will continue to flourish.

So, what might strategic-thinking, ambitious, and motivated consultants consider doing with the lessons learned from this study to build their businesses even further?

## A Wake Up Call To The Roof Consultant Industry!



I believe this study provides data that can be utilized to help significantly affect the prosperity of the roof consultant industry. To accomplish this will require active leadership and commitment at the national, regional, local, and personal levels. The primary commitment: communication.

Why? This research data is robust with core communication value that can be used to educate property owners and man-

agers in the value of utilizing roofing consultants – in the most credible way – from the “mouths” of roofing contractors.

Just imagine sharing the power of a national market research study demonstrating the following:

<b>“Professional Roofing Contractors Claim, Using A Professional Roofing Consultant...”</b>	<b>% Who Agree</b>
1) Enhances The Overall Project	95%
2) Adds Value For The Property Owner	83%
3) Provides Better Specifications Than From Architect	76%

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## TYPICAL ROOFING CONTRACTOR

Employees	12
Revenues	\$1 million
<b>Business Type</b>	
Commercial	43%
Residential	45%
Sheet Metal	8%
Mix	Public: 28% / Private: 72%
<b>Project Workload</b>	
New Construction	34%
Re-roof	38%
Re-cover	10%
Repair/Maintenance	10%
Other	8%
Total	100%

Table 9

## ROOF SYSTEMS MOST COMMON IN WORKLOAD

	Consultant	Contractor
BUR	94%	42%
Single Ply	90%	77%
Metal	75%	56%
Steep Slope	68%	54%
Spray Foam	23%	10%

Table 10

The key to any business is simple. Understand the customers' pain. Share that you understand your customers' pain. Demonstrate that you can help resolve your customers' pain. Conversely, the "build a better mouse trap and they'll find you" theory is ridiculous.

Property owners and managers are concerned with value. They're concerned with quality. They're concerned with eliminating hassles. Use this data to help communicate proof that you're delivering value.

As far as the "feud" with contractors, perhaps it will continue in dialogue, but clearly there are building blocks of respect in the industry. However, there is room for improvement.

The roof consulting industry leadership, as well as individuals, will help the evolution of the relationship with contractors by focusing on core issues of friction, including sensitivity, communication, and simplicity of processes related to 1) change orders, 2) punch lists, and 3) the contractors' schedule.

The future of roof consulting continues to strengthen. This research proves it. Build on strengths and attempt to resolve annoyances, and the myths between contractors and consultants will become a memory. ■



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Dave Harrison** is a senior vice president for marketing and business development for GAF Materials Corporation and serves on its board of directors. He has spoken at various global conferences and has served as an adjunct professor at Babson College, Bentley College, Emory University, and Rutgers University.

In 1995, when Mr. Harrison was vice president of global marketing for Armstrong World Industries, he successfully helped lead its Building Products Division to the Malcolm Baldrige Award, the highest award given by the U.S. Department of Commerce. Harrison has helped in the turnaround of several troubled companies, including Hartmann Luggage, Lenox China and Crystal, Gorham Silver, Dansk housewares, and divisions of Eckerd Drugs.

Dave's early career was at Johnson and Johnson, where he

worked in consumer products, hospital products, and pharmaceuticals. While there, Dave helped start two new divisions. He was recognized with the Johnson and Johnson Entrepreneur Award, the national POPAI award from the Point of Purchase Institute, and the Diana Award from the National Wholesale Drug Association.

Prior to completing his MBA at the Darden School, University of Virginia, he started companies for a venture capital firm. These included a chain of art galleries, jewelry stores, an advertising agency, and a newspaper. Dave earned his BS at Babson College.



**DAVE HARRISON**