

The Role of the RRO

By Daniel J. La Fountain, RRO

How many times have you awakened to a 3:00 a.m. alarm, thinking that yet another day of battle was about to begin. Following the typical morning routine, a thermos of coffee and a dozen doughnuts, you are ready to head to the jobsite.

The morning traffic is thin as you make your way to the construction entrance. There you find a security guard/part time college student awaiting your arrival. After convincing him you are who you say you are, you are allowed on site. Upon arrival at the staging area, your first greeting of the morning comes from a man holding a flame thrower and about to fill the crisp morning air with the odor some refer to as "Black Gold" and others—well, we'll leave that up to your imagination. As you look in the rearview mirror, rubbing your eyes and shaking your head, a shiver runs up your spine as you remember that you, too, were once a viscosity engineer.

But now you have advanced to another level and are indispensable to owners, designers and contractors alike. You are a Registered Roof Observer (RRO).

As an RRO, you know that the best design can be flawed by a poor installation. It is terribly frustrating to design a roofing system that you believe satisfied the owner, roofing manufacturer, building officials and your own standards, only to have that design disregarded by a roofing crew which doesn't possess a set of plans or specifications, has a set of plans and specs but chooses not to utilize it, or has no one to turn to for instruction. That is when the most common mistakes are made and the roofing crew installs your intricate design the way they installed their last roofing system.

There are many reasons why this happens, but one of the most common is that a roofing contracting company consists of two sides: the project manager and superintendent, and the foreman and crew. The project manager and superintendent attend the pre-bid meetings, pre-construction meetings and progress meetings. The foreman and crew are then directed to install the roofing system. Typically, they do not know of the design requirements until after the design consultant directs them to remove and reinstall all or portions of their completed roofing work.

The foreman, in most cases, is present during the pre-construction meetings and progress meetings. But does he study the contract documents as closely as his superiors?

The question remains, do even the best outlined pre-construction meetings eliminate the problem of misinterpretation of contract documents? The answer is quite clearly, "no." There has to be a mechanism to resolve conflict and promote communication before hard work and expensive materials are wasted.

That is where the RRO is of great value.

The RRO is a person who can communicate successfully

with owners, design consultants and contractors. The RRO must be tactful, accurate and prompt when giving direction. It takes diplomacy to tell a roofing crew that their installation procedures lack specification requirements and not get thrown off the roof.

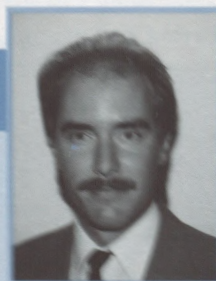
That is why it is very important to develop a positive relationship with the roofing crew from the very beginning of your assignment. You need to gain the respect of the roofing crew by proving your knowledge of the contract documents and the roofing industry. In return, you should respect their knowledge. Nitpicking a contractor's installation procedures will gain nothing.

Emotions should not influence decisions or responses to a roofing crew. As the RRO, you are there to aid the roofing contractor during installation. Most foremen take a great amount of pride in their work. They have a way of doing things that they feel is correct. You have to be sensitive to individual personalities and be aware that providing the same information to two different people can result in two very different responses.

An effective approach to problem resolution is to solicit the contractor's input. Explain to him the variance from the specification, for example, and listen to his response. Use your knowledge of the roofing industry and specifications to subtly guide the contractor to make a decision which will comply with the specifications while allowing him to believe it was his knowledge which resolved the issue.

Once the crew understands that you are there to assist them in interpreting the construction documents, that you are a line of communication and can help to correct oversights before they become removal issues, the anxiety and uncertainty of the first day will disappear.

Remember, you are only as good as the last observer this crew had...until you prove you're better.



About The Author

Daniel J. La Fountain is a Project Manager for the office of Martin Riley Mock architects/consultants. He received his associate of applied science degree from IIT Technical Institute and his Registered Roof Observer certification from RCI in 1995. He has been on RCI's Rooftop Quality Assurance Committee since 1995. La Fountain has been involved with the roofing industry since 1979, and was a roofing foreman from 1983-1991.