

Partnering For Performance

By JOHN BUSCH

Editor's Note: John Busch, keynote speaker at the RCI Convention in Dallas in April 1998, agreed to revisit some of the issues he spoke of then and write about the professional relationship between manufacturers and roof consultants. He has called it "Partnering for Performance."

The title for this paper sounds, perhaps, like a platitude. The word "partnering" is an in-vogue buzzword these days in business. As it relates to a broader picture, "partnering" is a good thing. So to suggest our performance might be enhanced by a partnership is something in which we should all be interested.

Who am I suggesting should become partners? Not manufacturers and consultants! Would I be so naive as to suggest that these two strongly independent entities might actually find mutual benefit through partnering?

... Why not?

In general, RCI and the manufacturing community are not leveraging their opportunities to capture the available synergies. But in actuality, there are no real obstacles to such "out of the box" thinking.

Two of the main ingredients of a partnership are mutual respect and trust. But somehow, a chasm between the two would-be partners evolved which challenged those necessary ingredients. Where did it all begin? I don't know. Perhaps when the consultant movement started to organize back in 1983, the manufacturers were irritated by a new foreign element interfering with their marketing philosophies to influence owners and specifiers. Everything was working fine, thank you—we didn't think we needed this splinter group of frustrated contractors and retired manufacturers trying to create another element in the decision process. In reality, I doubt there was any conscious resistance to roof consultants—there just wasn't any understanding of any benefit they might serve.

Consultants, on the other hand, might have merely been reacting to the manufacturers' snub and became determined to succeed without them.

But clearly, manufacturers and consultants do not enjoy a true partnership today. They are working in parallel in many cases—heading in the same direction, but without any cooperative alliance in effect.

When we critically analyze our industry, we come to the conclusion that no other part of the building's composition is subject to such stringent performance criteria as roofing. In contrast, however, the roofing budget for a project is minimal. Perhaps this is because it is typically out of sight—and therefore—out of mind. This performance/cost relationship may explain in part why roofing experiences the largest amount of litigation during the life

of the building.

Unquestionably, it raises the challenge for all parties involved to provide the ultimate roof. Therefore, it is mandatory that all the functions producing the finished roof are orchestrated for optimum efficiency. Yet, we have just identified a critical disconnect between two of the key participants in the process—the roofing consultant and the manufacturer. How can this misalignment be corrected?

To objectively analyze the potential of partnering, let's begin by identifying where we each are, separately, today.

First, let's take the clearly objective "givens": RCI is unquestionably growing in size, significance, and value provided—both to its members and the industry. On the other hand, the manufacturing community is actually shrinking in number, due to widespread consolidation; but accordingly, the acquirers are growing in both breadth and depth. That is to say they are increasing the number of products offered, while increasing their market share of the products in their line.

From a subjective perspective, the picture is not as positive. Consultants have concerns that the growing mega manufacturers pursue major owners directly and promote their specific roof system preferences. In fact, some owners actually solicit manufacturers directly to be their sole source for providing the complete roofing package, installed and guaranteed. Consultants view this practice as a threat to their role. Obviously it challenges the use of consultants in the design/specification stage. They are uncomfortable with the idea that a manufacturer with a single product offering might misrepresent their capabilities and distort the owners' understanding of all the options available. In such a scenario, the owner could be unaware of an alternative and naively pay more and get less than possible with a more appropriate system. The perception is that the manufacturer can be profit driven and not have genuine concern for the owners' best interests.

From the manufacturer's viewpoint, consultants can create mischief when the roof system is being designed and at the opposite end of the cycle—when it begins to fail. The idea that a consultant might favor certain manufacturers for reasons other than pure capability, would explain why manufacturers might try to eliminate them from the decision-making stages. Secondly, a frustrated owner may employ a consultant to do a forensic analysis of a failing roof system. If the consultant's conclusions suggest manufacturer liability or if at times they serve as a professional expert in a litigation case, hostilities can easily breed between them.

As is the case in so many situations, the subjective perceptions are those that seem to create the obstacles. Let's peel back the whole situation from a totally objective perspective.

There clearly is an overpowering common interest—a mutual customer—the building owner. The next step is to examine the respective capabilities and roles of each of the parties.

RCI has been the keystone in establishing consistent criteria for defining the qualifications of roofing consultants. Registration through its comprehensive program confirms the basic roofing knowledge of the individual consultant. It requires them to have an in-depth understanding of design criteria, individual product properties and functions as well as application procedures for installing systems. In addition, they must comprehend the elements of an effective maintenance program and its benefits.

The consultant's position is a unique one. They probably know more about the overall process than any of the individual disciplines. They know what is actually working in the field because they are typically involved in the application and maintenance of the final product. Because their role is often in judgment of the performance of one or more of the other parties, their overall popularity may be jeopardized.

Manufacturers are focused on producing quality products at optimum profits for their shareholders. To the degree that lower costs can yield enhanced profits, the relationship between high quality and lower costs is sometimes suspect. However, manufacturers go to great lengths and extensive testing to produce products that will fulfill the associated performance expectations. Long-term guarantees are a form of certification that the manufacturers are confident of the quality of their products. As the total system concept gains significance in the industry, quality assurance extends to the interfacing aspects of the individual products. Albeit a truly responsible manufacturer recognizes the interrelationships of quality, profits and long-term liability and the necessity to maintain appropriate balance among them. The manufacturers' real vulnerability with total system performance guarantees lies in proper application. Their method to control this variable is to utilize only certified applicators to install their systems.

Architects and roofing contractors, likewise, have specific capabilities that qualify them to perform their role in the overall process. However, inasmuch as this article is aimed at the manufacturer/consultant relationship, I will confine this analysis to the subject at hand. Besides, they do have some interrelationship with the roof consultants. Architects typically employ roof consultants to assist them with the design and selection of materials for roofing systems. Contractors are in a service role when a consultant is employed as an inspector on a job or they may also be an employer when they require supportive expertise in a dispute or litigation.

It is rare, however, for a manufacturer to request a consultant to assist in a production issue. One successful example of such teamwork occurred recently when Inspec of Minneapolis was dissatisfied with the asphalt absorption of perlite insulation boards. Johns Manville embarked on a research program, and, through a series of joint meetings and test installations, developed a coating that would improve their product's characteristics to comply with Inspec's expectations.

The issue here, however, is a lot more complex than an occasional success story. In a fundamental sense, the issue zeroes in on the specific role each party plays in the overall process of provid-

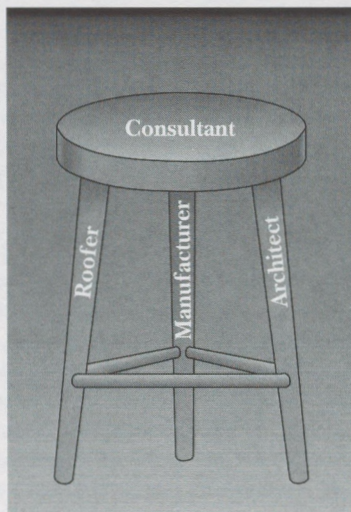
ing quality roofing systems.

There is a common analogy in the industry that a good roofing system is like a three-legged stool. If all three legs are the proper length, the stool is strong, sturdy and level and serves its function well. If any one of the legs is too long or too short, the stool becomes cockeyed, is not fit for use, and needs to be repaired or replaced. The legs of the stool in the roofing analogy correspond with the roles of the architect, roofer and manufacturer. It all starts with a good design, using quality materials properly installed. But...where does the consultant fit? It isn't real smart to convert to a four-legged stool—they are extremely vulnerable to instability and rocking. In the roofing analogy, another function

just isn't necessary. It wouldn't improve the performance, cost, or life of the roof—assuming all three elements did their function totally correctly to begin with. There it is! That's the answer. Where is the check that each function has properly performed? What correlates the three individual functions into an operating entity? What converts the three individual legs into a stool? The seat! Consider the previous definition of the consultant's capabilities, and it's obvious, that's exactly where they fit! They should be the facilitator for the whole process, keeping the owner's best interest as the focal point. If they integrate the efforts of the roofing contractor, the manufacturer and the architect, they can captain the teamwork of the individual functions to deliver the optimum solution to the owner's requirements. In addition, they can coach the owner in determining

the actual performance criteria necessary for the particular application. In this scenario, the consultant's role is paramount. Their proficiency and expertise determines the overall degree of success achieved with the product.

Thus, it should be obvious that manufacturers, as well as architects and roofing contractors, can all realize benefits by "partnering for performance" with the consultant. The concept of synergistically combining the individual areas of expertise, coupled with a supportive owner education program, need not only improve a specific job; but, if it could become the standard operating procedure typical on most roofing projects, then it surely could enhance the entire industry.



About The Author

John C. Busch is Director of Growth, Planning and Development with Johns-Manville, having been with the company for three decades. He has a B.S. and M.S. in Mechanical Engineering from Newark College of Engineering. John is past president of the Single Ply Roofing Institute (SPRI), on the Board of Regents of the Roofing Industry Education Institute (RIEI), and a current member of the Board of Directors of the Polyisocyanurate Insulation Manufacturers Association (PIMA).



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