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Making Construction Management Work For You

What an fm knows about construction can make the process run smoother.

By *Jerry Kingwill*



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Struggling to grasp the entirety of a construction project is a common challenge among facility managers (fms) who often act as the owner's representative throughout the process. Understanding the role of a construction manager (cm) is imperative for fms looking to achieve the best results for their projects.



Construction management holds hefty responsibilities, encompassing everything from time management and organization to intricate construction processes, strong communication, budgeting, and process implementation. Fms should learn the ins and outs of construction management to ensure they maintain complete control over their facilities, while also being able to work cooperatively with the cm throughout each stage of the project.

Choosing team players. Cms are responsible for selecting the appropriate members of the team—architects, engineers, designers, and sub-contractors. Favorable relationships are based on teamwork, trust, and communication. The fm must be aware of, and participate in, these aspects of relationship building, since a breakdown can lead to potential errors and additional costs.

Selecting these members is a complex task. Cms must question the priorities and capabilities of all potential team members. Safety, function, quality, completion date, aesthetics, location, maintenance costs, financing, and acceptable stress levels are all factors that weigh on the decisions of the cm. Similarly, an fm should evaluate the cm's team to be sure that its characteristics are a good fit for the

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Cost is also an important part of an fm's decision making process when choosing a construction team. Unfortunately, choosing the right team is all too often deterred by selecting the lowest bidder. This issue can be avoided by thoroughly researching the potential construction company. Fms can ensure that they are getting reliable business partners for a reasonable price. Fms should be wary of a distinctly low bid, since it could mean the cm has misquoted the job or omitted an

item in the budget. An omission or error in the initial budgeting phase will lead to additional and unexpected costs down the road.

Creating a budget that sticks. Fms should partner with a cm that has experience in all the necessary aspects of the construction process, from land acquisition to the completion of the contract warranty. This will aid in accurately addressing all possible financial matters in the initial budget, protecting the project against additional costs along the way.

A qualified cm should also be able to assure that all team members are familiar with the budget and can work within its guidelines. This budget document must outline all potential complications, including bonding and insurance costs. It is also important that the budget and project expectations are distributed to every team member.

When reviewing a budget, there are several other elements that an fm should look for before signing on the dotted line. Owner contingencies, for example, will offer protection from emergency costs and maintain the project's bottom line. Fluctuations in material costs, codes, administration needs, and weather conditions are all possible financial burdens that can be protected by contingency funds.

In addition to owner contingencies, contractor contingencies should be included in a budget to cover any additional items not identified in the initial proposal. The percentage for this contingency is based on the size of the project, which is often 10% of the total cost. This value is typically included in the guaranteed maximum price. This type of contingency applies only to the contractor's costs. Should the owner or fm make any changes affecting the initial cost, a change order would be necessary and applied to the guaranteed maximum price.

A successful timeline. Cms are responsible for properly scheduling assets such as labor, materials, equipment, and budgets. A well structured timeline should be developed by the cm and fm for a smooth operation. If this timeline is created appropriately, issues such as unavailable resources and wasted labor should not arise.

The three integral elements of a project are pre-construction, execution, and post-construction. Fms and cms must work together to monitor this progress as well as coordinate the phases with appropriate team members.

Pre-construction (phase one) encompasses items such as preliminary estimates, recommendations through value engineering, project scheduling, an updated and refined estimate, prepared bid packages, an organized cash flow schedule, and prescheduled meetings with subcontractors and vendors. All of these items should be compiled before the first shovel hits the ground.

Once all preliminary items are attended to, construction (phase two) can begin. Cms will provide coordination, administrative support, and project oversight throughout. Furthermore, a cm is responsible for overseeing on-site safety performance and quality control as well as obtaining all appropriate permits. Certain tasks, however, will be shared by the facility and construction managers, including scheduling, meetings, and maintaining records.

Phase three (post-construction) is the final step of the process. Once the project has been executed, the cm will submit all warranties, operations reports, maintenance information, and project documentation to the fm on time and within budget. If all the appropriate steps in a construction project have been taken, this final phase should be an enjoyable closure to a job well done.

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