

## Why is Productivity so Important?

### Breaking into the Construction Game.

In the construction industry there's a lot of competition to be the best. New contractors in the industry are looking for ways to be better than their competition in any way that will give them an edge over their competition. Since they're new to the game, experience is one advantage that they don't have yet. A good name is an equally elusive entity. Even as a new contractor strives to give the highest quality service at the the most competitive price, customers can be so fickle. Inevitably, It seems quite difficult to please everyone. Some customers want production. Others want quality. If you know what your customer wants then you can adapt to meet their needs.

### Quality vs. Quantity.

This is an old dilemma for nearly all those involved in the construction trades. The company owner always want both quality and quantity at the same time. The customer wants both, too. While this might be possible in theory, there is always a trade off for quality when there is pressure for more production. The pressure comes from all directions and for so many different reasons that the question of quality is answered by we just don't have time....just get it done....we'll fix it later . Deadlines in construction are the evil that we must all deal with the best way we can.

### Avoiding the Deadline Blues.

Most problems can be avoided with planning. But, .....you say .... we can't plan on the unexpected . I say .... why not ? Bad things happen all the time. Suppliers don't deliver when they say they are going to. The style and color that you ordered is out of stock and had to be reordered. The weather never seems to cooperate; it rains for two weeks straight when all your work is outside. Key workers come down with the flu. Tools break down. Water is leaking in around the sewer pipe. The wrong materials are delivered. You run out of materials. Mistakes are made and have to be rebuilt. Tools come up missing. Owners change their minds. The plumbers didn't show up and they are putting everyone else behind. Accidents ruin the new floor and it has to be replaced. Paint gets spilled

and the carpet needs to be relayed.....You ask...how did you know these things just happened to me on my last job? Do you have a crystal ball....?

Expect the Unexpected. You'll be far Ahead of your Competition.

Being the ultimate optimist may seem to be the answer. It is a good goal to think that everything will go as planned. However, being realistic is being smarter. If you don't plan on unexpected things happening on a construction job then you haven't planned well enough. Once you realize that you know that there will be unexpected events, they are no longer unexpected. Keep in mind that there is a big difference between expecting the unexpected and controlling the unexpected. You can't do anything about controlling the unexpected. It's too stressful to think about trying to control the things that are beyond your control. So put the worry out of your mind.

So many factors are beyond the control of the the general contractor. Among these are spiraling building material costs, record high gasoline prices, record high diesel fuel prices, and proportionately out of control insurance premiums. Staggering health care costs are also preventing more and more companies from offering low cost health care coverage to employees. All of these factors are making it increasingly difficult to stay profitable and continue to provide good paying jobs to a large population of hard-working employees.

Productivity is a very complex issue. Many factors that affect production are beyond our immediate control. Governmental restrictions, Economic realities, environmental considerations, design problem, bad bidding procedures, management deficiencies and extreme, unforeseen job conditions are just some of the elements that can affect productivity. I won't be talking about these issues as these elements are mostly pre construction issues and don't have relevance to my evaluation of dealing with the on-the-job issues that we all have the power to control and do something about. In essence, plan your work...and work your plan.

Simply Plan.

Here are 15 ways that you can begin to take positive steps toward gaining control over those things that you can control. Increasing productivity is all about improving the way you plan. There is a big difference between productivity and efficiency. I am only going to talk about productivity in the rest of this article. I will go into more detail about efficiency and explain the big difference in my

next article.

1. Plan on extra time to get the job done even if you're sure that nothing will go wrong.
2. Plan on bad weather. There will be some.

Don't leave outdoor work until the last minute. That is flirting with the unexpected.

3. Plan on Making Back-up Plans. Good Communication is the Key.

Don't let snags in the schedule be the only reason for communication with the owner or the owner's rep. Make sure that you let the owners know of good things that crop up.....for instance, let them know that even though the weather has been really unpredictable, we are on schedule with the exterior siding work. Eventually, you will have to break the bad news about a set back to your client. However, you can turn this event into a positive for you. Make a back-up plan and present it to your client. Leave them confident that you are reacting to an unexpected problem in a way that shows resourcefulness and dedication to the project.

Don't let them know that you expected this unforeseen problem. Rest in the comfort that this wasn't unexpected. No need to stress about it...

Don't use this opportunity to start making excuses that you probably won't be able to finish before the deadline. The owner doesn't want to hear it and you don't want to talk yourself into it, because it hasn't happened yet, right?

4. Make time allowances in your contract with the owner.

Explain that you want to keep control of the quality of the service that you are providing. You don't want to compromise quality for reasons that are beyond your control.

5. Hold your suppliers accountable for their short comings.

Do this this without blaming them. Simply ask that they somehow make-up for the time that you are losing due to factors that should be within their control.....but don't try to prove blame! Casting the blame is

always a lose-lose battle.

6. Stay focused on quality work.

Time frames are always short on projects. Most construction jobs run down to the wire on their time lines. When owners and architects analyze the contractors abilities, they will put far more weight on the quality of the work than they'll put on a contractors inability to overcome all the unexpected things that can crop up on the job. Owners are always glad that their contractor didn't cut corners on quality just to finish on time. This alone is what builds a good name for you and will put your company ahead of your competition.....don't compromise on quality.

7. Control only the things that you can. Don't stress about things that haven't happened yet.

This may sound like it should go without being mentioned. That is exactly why I'm mentioning it, because too many supervisors and foreman constantly fret about things that are beyond their control. In the process, it's easy to loose focus on the immediate work. Keeping stress low makes the whole job run more smoothly. This fact can not be stressed enough ..... (pardon the pun).

8. Control Productivity. Team Effort is a Key Motivator.

9. Team up two or three workers to a job. Time goes by quicker and each member tends to push the others.

10. Put more experienced carpenters with those whom have less skill. Teaching at the same time as working builds productivity in the long haul as younger carpenters gain skill and confidence.

11. Organize the work place. Build shelves, take inventories and clean storage areas daily. Assign one key person to know what tools and supplies you have on the job. More importantly, this person will know what supplies are not on the job so these things can be supplied before productivity is

negatively affected.

12. It's the little things that will not only cut your productivity, but can drain you dry. Ensure that there isn't a lack of tools, bits, blades, screws, saws-all blades, sharp circular saw blades, nails the right size and kind, adhesives, sandpaper, etc.
13. Keep work areas clean. Nothing hinders productivity like a cluttered work site. Clean sites are safer, too. Safety should always rule!
14. Establish a systematic approach to production work. This is one of the hardest ideas to keep in mind as any job progresses. A structured approach can provide a sense of organization instead of organized chaos....
15. Allow yourself time to just simply watch how your crews are moving around with respect to others on the site. For example, are guys set up in the only path through the area? Are there too many workers in one area when a simple adjustment could relieve the congestion? Think about reducing steps. By this, I mean the amount of steps being taken to accomplish a task. Think more like an assembly line. One guy cutting, one guy installing, maybe one more bringing materials to the area, etc.

These 15 things that I have mentioned above may seem vary simple at first. Sometimes we just need to get back to the basics. Increasing productivity is a daunting task. There are many layers to this complex issue. But the biggest reason throughout the world for losses in productivity is stress....in one form or another. Any steps that you can take to reduce stress in the work place will increase productivity.

Since the dawn of the industrial age, systems have been developed and implemented in all areas of manufacturing, production workshops and factories of all sizes. The larger the factory, the more important it becomes to have a structured approach . These companies that produce products are as much as 1500 % more productive than some construction companies. Construction is not immune to the economic forces that govern the rest of the building world. If changes are not adopted soon, the construction industry, or more accurately the clients for which projects are done, are in

for some hard times ahead.

For more in-depth information about one method for a systematic approach at the job site.....see our article #4....Developing a Systematic Approach.

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