

Hello everybody. Dennis Engelbrecht with the Digging Deeper pod series. Thanks for tuning in today.

The other day at my home office during the lockdown here that we're in, I was sorting through my old papers and trying to get organized and be organized. I came across one of the first things a client contractor gave me when I entered the consulting business. And what it was is what good contractors or successful contractors do. The first item in bold at the top of the page was '**Glorify the Field**'. I thought that was a great reminder because really that's where the rubber hits the road in construction, where quality occurs, where productivity occurs, where good planning occurs.

It really happens out there on the job sites. What happens out there is important, and the people who do it are important. That's important sometimes, we have to be careful, our office is sort of that ivory tower and there's a very frequently sort of an office field divide in terms of culture. The field doesn't feel like they're appreciated enough. The office doesn't understand the field, or maybe doesn't get the things they need from the field to do their jobs and be efficient. And it's not in all companies of course, but it is in probably most construction companies and to some in a much greater degree than others. But what you have to remember in construction is really who serves whom.

Ultimately, if the rubber hits the road in the field and that's where the work gets done, really all of us in the office in our ivory tower are there to support the field, to get them the things on time, in the right place for them to do the job and move the project forward. And we have to keep that in mind. So, in terms of glorifying the field, what are the other things to think about? What are the things you can do to make them feel like they're appreciated, worthy, part of the team? So, company events comes to mind, of course, and oftentimes companies do two or three companywide events a year. I can tell you from my experience and my experience doing this ourselves on our miscellaneous metals company some years ago, we had a company party and we invited all of the fabrication shop people and all of the field people, but they actually never came.

The party really became an office party as opposed to a company party. And then what we finally came to realize was the structure of the whole thing, it was a drive for them at night, there was drinking and things like that, which they may be didn't want to participate in. It wasn't family friendly, wasn't necessarily, it was a little bit too formal and maybe they didn't feel like that was a situation where they could bring their spouses. We definitely had a high Hispanic culture out there too, and we didn't do anything menu wise or otherwise to really make that a comfortable experience.

So, what most people tell me, the ones that everyone participates most in and appreciates most are the company picnics where the children are involved, the families are involved. They get to spend an afternoon more so than an evening on a weekend. And they really get to interact with folks, play games, and things like that. And definitely that's the one thing that I think everybody says is probably the best for the field or from a field standpoint.

The next thing I want to talk about is communication. Communication's difficult. These job sites maybe anywhere hours and in some case states away from the office. So communication is difficult. They're not there day-to-day, even if they are invited into a meeting, it's by Zoom or over the phone. And that's not necessarily the ideal for relationships and open communication either. So how do you communicate with those folks? How do you keep them abreast of what's going on in the company? How do you keep them involved in the company's successes, the company's challenges, everything that's going on?

Certainly, newsletters are good, more and more lately with technology, I see more leaders filming little blogs like this and putting them out to the field, keeping track of birthdays and keeping track of anniversary dates for how long you've worked. Those sorts of things. Newsletters can be an effective way of talking about the work we're looking at in the future, the work you have coming down the pike. Certainly, among construction workers, if you said, "What's the one thing you want to know?" They want to know what's going to happen next, where the company's next work is coming from. They want to know they have a job and they have some challenges in the future.

The next thing I want to talk about in glorifying the field is getting the office and the leaders out to the field and frequently enough. In our CEO round tables, probably every time, and of course, it's not every, but I bet it's over 90% of the leaders will admit to not getting out to the jobs often enough. And yet when they do, the level of appreciation they get and the impact they have is really outsized because that's when people know that you care about the work they're doing out there, what they're accomplishing. And of course, how you do that, what you do when you go to that site has a big impact. Also, if you engage people on a personal level, ask them how the family's doing, maybe bring up something that you're following up on that you knew about, how's your wife? Is she fully recovered from the so and so?

Those sorts of questions, actually engaging people and then thanking them, shaking their hands and thanking them has a huge impact. I also want to add, taking the office out to the field. Sometimes that appreciation for the field does get lost because people don't get out there enough. So, every once in a while, caravan the office people, get them in a van, take them on out, maybe you're in concert with a lunch at the site or something like that. But even just touring the site and let them see what the folks are doing. They may see, oh my gosh, these people have to put up with all this mud from the rain for the last three weeks or something like that. So, you get that mutual appreciation and mutual communication going on. And that's so important to make sure that they feel like they are part of the company.

The next thing I want to talk about is PM and superintendent, project manager, superintendent collaboration. That level of collaboration, walking the job site together, people see that, people see them working together, working on the schedule going forward, things like that. Now that can't happen if you're only communicating over the phone. The project manager has to get out to the site, has to spend that time, dedicate that time. And I think you'd find your collaboration on the job, your schedule planning, all things on that job will go better if you try to devote that time, spend the time in person, make sure there's a true collaboration on the job between those two positions. And I think the other people then see that happening also and get that feeling again about one company feel.

Next thing is group meetings. It's hard and it's expensive to pull all the superintendents in for a superintendent meeting or to have an all company meeting. It is hard, it is expensive, but it's definitely worth it. If you're not doing it, you're not overcoming the challenges, you're definitely missing an opportunity. And again, those meetings are also an opportunity to solicit feedback. All right? When do the field people truly get a chance to give the feedback that they may have on the company back? Well, again, you want to create those opportunities. So, having those group meetings, all company meetings, superintendent meetings and doing them regularly are your opportunity for that.

Next thing, make sure you are sharing your successes. Send out a group text, boy, we just landed our most important project or big project for next year. Or we just finished up this project on time, successful, on budget. Just did our topping out over here, congratulations to team so and so. All of those sorts of things are great for again, company morale and unanimity. One of the things a lot of folks are doing is they cook for their team, they actually go out, whether it's the project manager, the VPs, the president, the owners, getting out to the job and doing a group luncheon, that type of thing, or doing an after work thing for the team, those types of things go a long way. The actual cooking for them, putting on the apron and doing the work, that again, just brings you to their level and just improves that ability to communicate and brings the field and the office together.

And then of course, there's recognition and reward programs. All of those are definitely important. I heard a story in our last group of round tables where a key long-term employee left the company because they felt slighted when they didn't get a 25-year anniversary award. And you think, wow, what a little thing. But these things are not little. Remember again, that those folks are out away from the core of your office and all of that. They are not connected day-to-day. So those little things mean even more to them.

And one last thing in glorifying the field, and that's your safety commitment. So, if the top leaders of the company have a true safety commitment, and when I say safety commitment, I'm not talking about your commitment to having a low EMR

or what your costs are or anything like that. I'm talking about truly caring about the safety of all the workers on that site, that they get home to their families safely. And that you have a culture around that. When you show that, that shows care, they feel the care and that definitely glorifies the field well. So, in summary, if you haven't thought about it for a while, remember the most successful contractors glorify the field.

Thanks for tuning in.