

Good morning, everybody. Dennis Engelbrecht, Digging Deeper.

Today I want to revisit something I've talked about a lot in the past, and talking to folks recently, it's come up quite a bit. And that probably has to do with the current environment in construction, which has really become so difficult with the supply chain issues and price rises and all of that, and of course, the shortage of people that we have.

And the issue I want to talk about today is really job site culture. I think job site culture is the most important duty of all for a superintendent. His job to set the stage where everybody can be successful, where everybody can be happy, where people want to come to the job is so important. And not to lay that all on the superintendent, it's definitely a team job in setting that job site culture. It definitely involves the project manager, possibly the senior project manager, even the customer, the architect, all the folks involved, but really, the superintendent is at the hub of that.

So how to do that again? What should you focus on to set a great, positive job site culture? One of the things I've heard in one of my recent strategic planning outings was about setting a worthy goal for the job.

I was in a company that was talking about the past and they said, "We used to have a lot of rah-rah on the job. We used to get everybody together and they had a common goal," and I thought this was really interesting, "A common goal to get everybody completely 100% paid within 30 days of substantial completion."

I thought, "Wow." First of all, I haven't heard of a job that actually got everybody 100% paid within 30 days of substantial completion. But I thought, "What a goal." That gets everybody working together, whether it's quality, pre-punch list items, things like that, making sure billings are on time, making sure change orders are done.

Make sure everything that goes into making that a great job moves along well so that the payments can move along, and that when we get done, it can be done-done, right? And we can get off the job and be great. And I thought, "Wow, that's a worthy goal for any job."

But setting a worthy goal for the job, whether it's going to be around quality, safety, some combination, client satisfaction, the schedule, but getting your team together and getting everybody focused together on a worthy goal really is going to help that job site culture.

I think it's important to set a mood of cooperation and collaboration. I can remember as a subcontractor in years past, on some jobs, we had people running over our materials with their forklifts and people would go to do their stuff. They'd just kick stuff out of the way and our people might do the same, instead of looking out for each other on the job.

So, setting that mood of cooperation and collaboration where people are sharing equipment on the job to save money, people are helping each other out, ingress and egress, and working around each other, talking about, "Okay, you get going here, I'll follow right behind you there." That sort of cooperation really helps everybody be successful on the job.

And I think the superintendent again probably plays the key role in that to make sure when folks come on the job site that they feel welcome, that there's an environment that's set. And a lot of times they can do that with their own attitude. I think the simple question of when they first meet a subcontractor or trade contractor coming on the job, "How can I make this job successful for you?"

If you just ask a question like that, all of a sudden, you're already in a mood of cooperation and collaboration, but how things get worked out in those weekly meetings and things like that, all of that plays into that.

I think the other big part of job site culture is really setting the standards. Those standards can be cleanliness. Talking to a near-retiring executive recently back to their time as a superintendent, he said, "The number one thing I always did was make sure I had a clean job site because that set a lot of expectations for everything. All of a sudden people had higher standards for quality, cooperation, all of these other things just by having a clean job site." And I think that to some extent that's true. It sets a discipline, and it sets a standard for all the other things that go on.

But you also have to set the standards for quality. And it's so important I think on a job site, as any trade is beginning their work, that the overall superintendent is there, but also the trade superintendent is there to make sure they get started with the quality that is expected on the job.

Another best practice that I've heard is posting the owner's three or four key quality standards that they'd like to have on the job, what are the three or four things they're most concerned with about quality and posting those up in the job trailer. That really can set, again, a tone for what's important and what people should be looking for, and again, set a standard for quality through the job.

Safety, of course, another one where you always want to make sure that there are high standards and set those standards early, make sure that folks are taking safety clearly, that they're wearing their PPE, that they're watching out for unsafe conditions and all of those other things to make sure you have a safe job site.

We talked about general consideration and that goes with ingress-egress, how people are storing their materials, storing their equipment, and that people are watching out for other people's stuff also so that hopefully they'll watch out for theirs.

Setting the expectation for punch list and punch list considerations. Again, you can let folks just slap a whole bunch of stuff together, and then you can have an infinite punch list and you can have problems where you got people having to take things apart to fix things and all of that, or you can make sure quality goes along as you go to make sure you have a running punch list, to make sure that the expectation is that people solve their problems before they leave the site each day or before they demobilize from the site overall.

And those sorts of things, again, are expectations that you can set. Even the expectations for how you're going to create your final punch list. Had some contractors sort of a best practice of going to a single room and saying, "Okay, how are we going to set the punch list? What is the standard here for paint? And what kind of lighting are we going to use to determine whether this is acceptable, not acceptable? And what is standard?" And then using that standard throughout. But there are many ways of setting expectations along this way, and that's very important.

I think there's also a lot of culture around the expectations of changes and change orders and how those get handled. Are they taken care of quickly? Are they resolved to everyone's satisfaction? And that starts with the very first change orders or the changes that you have to do on a job site just to continue working before the change order pricing and all of that is done.

How all of those things are handled, if you set a standard early on for people getting their information in early, for getting those addressed early, for deciding whose responsibility is what, if it's a change of plans, if it's an owner responsibility, a contractor responsibility, a trade responsibility. Whose issues those are, get those decided and get those communicated and get those communicated early.

That's a big thing, especially for the whole trade community and how they're going to feel about a job, how they're going to feel about their job culture as you go along. So again, if you have the opportunity for setting that standard and establishing a good standard, that's important.

And finally, at a job site, find ways to have fun. Find ways to get some personal relations up. Going out to lunch with some folks, bringing in pizzas for everybody, having a party to celebrate different milestones along the way.

And for those of you, again, in the superintendent role or above that, make sure that you set a budget for these things. Why not have a budget for taking everybody out for dinner one night or having pizza brought in, or getting some prizes, getting some T-shirts for everybody? Different ways to create camaraderie, different ways to create that team environment that you have out there.

But job site culture is so important to the ultimate conclusion of that job, whether it finishes on time, with the quality and hopefully with the profitability for everybody that's been on that job. So don't neglect your job site culture. Remember it is really key to your success.

So, thanks again. Dennis Engelbrecht, Digging Deeper.