

Good morning, welcome to Digging Deeper. I'm Dennis Engelbrecht with The Family Business Institute and the CEO Roundtable Program for Contractors.

Today I want to talk about a book I've read, and I know I've done a blog on this before. But today I want to talk about *The Experience Economy*. The fact that so much of the economy now is based on experiences and the value that experience brings. And one key aspect of that in construction is your customer - making sure your customer has an excellent and rewarding experience in your interactions with them, whether that's doing a job for them or being a subcontractor for them. The experience your customer has in working with you is your product. Even more so than the building you build, because that's a commodity. The experience is what's going to make a customer loyal. It's what's going to bring them back to you. It's what it's going to allow you to get work with a higher fee as you go forward and have more reliability in your future, because you have repeat work that you're doing for clients that you have great relationships with.

So, think about that, that the experience is your product. And now if that's so, what is the role that everybody has? If you think of a performance on stage, everybody has a role and each role is really critical. The dances that are going on while somebody sayings and everything creates an ambience that really makes the show a success or a failure. All those little things, the lighting, the staging, everything comes together to make a great experience. Think about how Disney World or Disneyland works and how all the characters always stay in character. And they're always doing exactly the specific things to make your experience a great one.

So how does this apply to construction? Well, in construction also, everybody has a role in creating this experience. Number one, people do business with people they like and that brings us to relationship. So how much time do you actually spend creating a relationship with your client that goes beyond the fact that I'm doing this transactional job for my client of building a building or getting the electrical installed or whatever I'm doing? But if you can take that and get them out to lunch, create a relationship where you know the person, you know their family or of their family at least, they know of your family. Now when you hit a roadblock along the way, you've got a common way to converse and work through the issues and problems. A better way to communicate, to have clear communication and easier communication. That's so important to have a relationship. So, the relationship is part of the experience because people do business with people they like. Make sure you have a relationship and they're going to enjoy their journey more.

The next thing I want to talk about is the easy button. You sometimes see advertisements where they talk about pressing the easy button. Well, your customers also want an easy button. So, make the work easy for them. How do you make the work easy for them? Well, if you're giving them a report or you're giving them some data, maybe you provide some background, you provide data for decisions. You bring solutions and not just problems. Or when you bring problems, you bring them with alternative solutions and recommendations. All of that is part of what makes it easy. So, as you go through your day to day at work, think what you can frame to make it easier for your customer to have you as their source.

You also want to make sure you're extremely responsive. Don't leave the customer guessing. If they send you an email asking a question about something and you don't know the answer, well don't go off for three days investigating it without responding. They don't know number one that you read the mail. Number two, that you're working on the email. Number three, that you're working toward a solution they'll be happy with. So, if you have a situation like that, be responsive. Be responsive immediately, "Oh, thanks for bringing that to my attention. I'll go find out what's happening. See if I can solve the problem or find a solution and get back to you within one day, three days". Don't over commit and then disappoint your client. But make sure they know you're working on it. You're working toward a solution.

And then if you do set a deadline, when you're going to get back to them, get back within that deadline even if you don't have a solution. Even if you're still investigating, even if you're still waiting on somebody else to give you the information and the data. Make sure that you're responsive and they feel responsive. Really the most important quality of the entire

experience for your client is to be able to sleep well at night knowing you've got it. And that's where the responsiveness and that communication comes in.

Now, let's go beyond you as the lead person on this project and talk about the role that everybody else has to play in this and the role that may come from other aspects of the interactions. Think about your meetings. How do you plan and run your meetings? Do you run them for success? Do you run them, again going back to, making it easy for your client or easy for everybody that they have all the information, they have the understanding so that they can weigh in with their opinions and you can get to solutions? How do you make your job site? Is it clean? Are things organized? Do you have proper signage? In a recent interaction with a client, I found that they had the client identify their key quality concerns, and they had those on a board in the office. So, every time the client walked in, they could look at their key quality concerns to know that they were being attended to. To know that people cared about what their key concerns are.

So that's just a look again that you do. Think about pre-construction. In pre-construction when you're doing your value engineering, perhaps, and you're presenting alternative approaches, are you presenting all of the knowledge? How are you presenting that? Are you putting it in a PowerPoint where they can understand it, where they can see the alternatives, where they can easily take alternative A and alternative B and be able to understand it fully and come to a decision? Or are you just throwing things out verbally where they can't get their arms around it? How you present your paperwork and how your company presents your paperwork. Think about your meeting minutes. How do they read? Is it easy? Is it easy for me to focus on the things as your customer that I have to do or I'm responsible for? Do I know who's responsible for the things that I'm not responsible for? Do I have the action items clarified? Do I know what's next? Do I know when the next meeting is? Is it all clear? And is it easy to read, easy to see?

Think about the other kinds of written things that people get. Your daily reports, are they informative? Are there photos there to help me understand the way things are? Your billing. Is your billing clear? And again, this starts to take us into the back office. Your billings, your change orders, how those things are presented to them. Right down to quality assurance. First of all, having a quality assurance program, again shows that you care about the customer. You care what they think. You care about how they're feeling. How you do that QA? Do you get them a simple form? Does it arrive by email or do they get a call from the CEO asking them how they feel? What's going right? What's going wrong? How would you rate this project on a one to five scale? If it's a four, "Whoa, what would make it a five for you? Where aren't we achieving to that ultimate level for you? What can we change on our side?". So, if you just think about the role each person plays in that, are they playing a role that leaves the client feeling like they've had that great experience?

Just one other example about a role each person has, even the person who answers the phone. I have a client that calls their receptionist, the director of first impressions. Now, not that everybody should go out and necessarily copy that idea, though it's not a bad idea. But that feeling you get when somebody answers the phone. Immediately, you can feel whether they're helpful, whether you're an inconvenience to their day on the other side. And they get you to the right person, hopefully, and they don't leave you at stuck in voicemail when you need an immediate response, all of those things. They're making an impression on you. Each person that speaks or interacts with a client or whose work product interacts with the client has a role to play in staging your great experiences for your clients. So, think about that, make sure your clients having a great experience and you'll have more success with your construction company.

Again, Dennis Engelbrecht, Digging Deeper. Thanks for tuning in.