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# Unlock the Power of Transparency in Unexpected Relationships

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*by: David Stutzman*

All organizations have a method and process that works for their projects. The project team is assembled, the schedule is laid out, the budget is set, and away you go. Each phase of the project has its set of deliverables. Each deliverable has the appropriate project team members creating the content for discussion and decisions, before moving on to the next phase. All documentation delivered to the Owner is an appropriate, clear, and clean set with obvious areas to review. Correct?

Transparency and collaboration are the two most commonly heard words during discussions about improving the construction industry. Of the two, transparency is the more powerful. Transparency transforms individual behavior with improved collaboration, transforms content with improved reliability, and transforms outcomes with informed decisions.



The concept of applying transparency through documentation can significantly transform a project and create results that are undeniable for success. Transformation happens in a strategic, yet organic, way that changes behaviors on the team, document content in specifications and drawings, and project outcomes. Trust is built and strengthened.

Think of a project in terms of a plant or flower that will grow and bloom into something amazing. As with any organism that has unpredictable elements that affect its opportunity for growth and development, so does the project:

- Pricing & market volatility.
- Bid pricing vs. material costs.
- Supply chain issues. What is available? When is it available?
- Labor shortages, which in turn affect scheduling.
- Culture of frustration, when collaboration lacks
- Communication faults, when operating in silos.

Creating a transparent environment must be a conscious decision - a decision made and enforced by the Owner. The Good Owner shares information with the entire project team so project requirements are clearly documented. Then the Owner encourages transparent, collaborative participation in decision-making to leverage the experience and expertise of the entire team - designers, contractors, estimators, suppliers. The result? Expectations met!

Transparency requires a cultural mind-shift from the traditional, siloed project approach. Transparency must be inherent from the start so project data, participants, and decisions are in full view, allowing group response when decisions deviate from project objectives. Transparency improves decision-making because of full visibility into the process. The process allows exploration of alternative ideas and selection of the optimal solutions as informed decisions that dramatically improve project outcomes. Is this The COAA Way?

The tools are available to create transparency. Projects must move to web-based processes to allow team members to develop project data and make decisions on systems, assemblies, and products jointly. Web-based tools have existed for models and drawings for some time. Web-based specifications technology is emerging, now. So both project design deliverables can be developed, shared, and maintained, jointly by the entire team, in the cloud.

Embrace the power of the cloud:

- Begin reviewing documents BEFORE traditional and contractual milestones occur.
- Use technology to share work in progress to enable continuous review and decision making.
- Make the entire process transparent for the entire project team.

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There is simplicity to this idea: it is just a matter of leveraging the tools that each member of the team already uses. More importantly, it is a matter of putting the correct members of the team together, at the correct time, in order to provide ultimate understanding in all areas of the project. **A powerful pair that must be put at the beginning of the process and placed together is the estimator and the specifier, working directly with the Owner. Both members must be engaged at the beginning of the project.**

Specifications include all written project data. Specifications record all project decisions. Each decision affects the estimate. Each estimate line item informs the specification. Consequently, the two should be developed concurrently and maintained continuously to inform each project team decision.

Identifying the Owner's project requirements, documenting them in a simple narrative by the specifier, and sharing them with the estimator provides an initial picture of the systems needed. The framework of the budget begins. Availability of certain components is brought to the front of the process, and strategies begin to take shape as project team members work to achieve the best results possible. Before putting pen to paper in the design stage, the Owner works with the specifier and estimator to put together a very clear idea of how the project can achieve success by fully understanding what systems and assemblies can be constructed based on the defined conditions.

Every member of the project team says "if only I can get to the Owner at the beginning." Through the estimator and specifier, transparency immediately becomes open and discussions available. For instance, the estimator has direct communication with trades, installers, and contractors. The specifier has unique and strong relationships with product representatives, technical advisors, and manufacturers. Together, the specifier and estimator have a strong pulse on the industry.

Engage a cloud-based tool that has the critical purpose to infuse transparency into any project, and also has the simple, yet extraordinary ability to leverage and strengthen relationships through organic application and function of team members - the specifier and estimator. The COAA Way supports these relationships. The Good Owner cultivates them.



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