

## Lessons Learned: Part I

### *Insight from Project Managers who have seen it all!*

With over 130 years' combined experience, our Project Management team has been around the block. We polled them to get the details about their top lessons learned and got so many great pearls of wisdom, we decided to spread it out over a series. Here is Part I.

**It may be a cliché, but don't underestimate the power of doing the "Three C's" well.**

The resounding agreement among our seasoned Project Management team was that **Communication**, **Collaboration**, and **Coordination** are the biggest keys to a successful construction project.

**COMMUNICATION** is the immediate response we got when asking our Project Managers about the biggest lesson they have learned over time. Says Senior Project Manager Ted Miller, "Communication is key at every level of the project team. An Owner can guide success by clarifying needs and priorities, while a Superintendent can contribute by facilitating communication and bridging gaps between the field, office, owner, and subcontractors. Maintaining open lines of communication at every level of the team is critical to ensure understanding of design intent, owner goals, and expectations."



"Supplying information and contact details to the neighboring community - both individuals and local businesses or organizations - can make all the difference in an overall impression of a project. Simply giving neighbors a head's up about what to expect, how it might impact them, and an overview schedule can make neighbors feel at ease and eliminate many frustrations."

*- Jake Moyer, Senior Project Manager*

One often overlooked value found in solid communication is in the development of strong relationships with neighboring community members and residents. This outside-the-box thinking can help guide more successful outcomes and a smoother process for everyone.

**COLLABORATION** was another common answer among our Project Managers. A collaborative focus naturally leads to a more efficient and positive experience for the entire project team. One of the tools we utilize here at Horst is the Team dashboard

and portal through our Viewpoint technology system. It is a great tie-in for all participants to stay on the same page and share information. "On my most successful projects, I have maximized collaborative thinking by using lean construction techniques. It is a way to ensure different perspectives are considered and all project team members are heard,"

says Ted. It is also a way to specifically send a clear message that we respect and appreciate the expertise each member of the project team brings to the table.

That collaboration can also play a huge role when it comes to problem solving. Pulling everyone - the design team, owner, contractor, and subcontractors - into a room together can eliminate compounding issues and allows the team to steer together toward a resolution.

Rounding out the final C is **COORDINATION**. This lesson has certainly been one our Project Managers have learned in their roles, but it is also a lesson that many project Owners learn the hard way. The impact coordination has on the success of a project cannot be overstated - and ignoring its importance can have devastating results.

One of the reasons we are such proponents of the Design-Build method here at Horst is because of the immense challenge Owners face in coordinating efforts with some other project delivery methods. When project documents have been created in “silos” by the individual project players such as civil, architectural, mechanicals, etc., there is a great potential for running into issues. This makes it critical to bring the entire team together throughout the design process to ensure project documents align properly. While your design partners certainly would not intentionally exclude something, it is common for very capable professionals to have a focused mindset that does not account for the other disciplines. This often leads to change orders, delays, and price increases for the Owner.

The good news is, this can be largely avoided by implementing proper planning, coordination, and intentional communication between the team. It requires being very attentive to the process and an understanding of the potential pitfalls. It is a large burden for an Owner to take on, especially because they have their own businesses or organizations to run. The Design-Build method is a great solution to this particular problem because the selected Design-Builder will take over as advocate for the Owner and act as the point person for these critical coordination matters. It becomes the Design-Builder’s responsibility to gather the team and ensure appropriate coordination of drawings and specifications.

Another valuable tool for coordination of documents is utilization of an overlay methodology. This essentially means the drawings from various disciplines are layered over one another to ensure important aspects of the project such as mechanical and electrical details line up with the structural and architectural designs. According to Special Services Project Manager Josh Kaska, “Overlays are a great way to ensure everything is coming together the way it should. Taking the time to do this step can save tons of headaches down the road, when it will be much more costly and difficult to correct any discrepancies.”

**We hope you have enjoyed Part I of our Lessons Learned Series. Stay tuned for Part II next month!**

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*Please feel free to contact us to schedule a phone call or consultation.*

**“Problems often compound. If you fix one issue using a narrowly focused mindset, you are not considering the long-term impact on other disciplines. It’s easy to snowball. In my experience, it is much easier to take the time and effort to get everyone together and minimize a problem’s impact on the big picture.”**

**- Ted Miller, Senior Project Manager**

## Lessons Learned: Part II

*Valuable insights for the beginning stages of your project!*

With over 130 years' combined experience, our Project Management team has been around the block. We polled them to get the details about their top lessons learned and got so many great pearls of wisdom, we decided to spread it out over a series. Here is Part II.



### At the beginning of a project, you don't know what you don't know.

Even those Owners who have gone through significant construction projects in the past have learned the hard way that each project has its own nuances. From land development to clarity of project documents, here is what our Project Managers had to share that can help you make good decisions in the beginning stages of your project.

#### Bring in the experts.

Building your construction team as early as possible will give all participants the opportunity to provide you with valuable information that could greatly benefit your project. We are not just saying this because we are proponents of the Design-Build method; having a qualified and dedicated team at the beginning of your project can save you a lot of headaches

“Selecting a team of experts when the project is still in design is advantageous in developing a ‘work smarter’ approach. It allows for valuable discussions about design intent and encourages steering through the project together as a unified team.”

*- Ted Miller, Senior Project Manager*

- not to mention time and money - down the road. Your team can provide options for new ideas, products, or methods that you may not be aware of. They will give insights into value engineering opportunities and clarify design documents, all while maintaining a focus on your project goals. Furthermore, they can provide an overview of preventative maintenance and life cycle information, giving you a head's up of what to expect once you are physically in your new building or space.

#### Land development and permits.

One area that often catches people by surprise is land development. Even on projects where it seems that there will be little site work necessary, getting through the red tape of the land development process can require some finesse. It is not uncommon for this portion of the project process to take six months to a year, and in some cases it has pushed projects out by several years - or caused them to be abandoned all together. Navigating the process of zoning, permitting, municipality requirements, and legal approvals can be exhausting. Starting the process much earlier than you think necessary and being well informed about the specific requirements will help keep your project moving along toward the finish line.

### Homework helps you ace the test.

Much like school children are encouraged to do their homework so they can master the material and ace the test, successful construction projects require some studying. Your construction team should know the project inside and out before the work even begins on a job site. Looking far ahead and working your way back enables you to circumvent the possible pitfalls and design a schedule that meets your project's individual needs.

### Documentation.

Having well-prepared documents that are specific to the project and have been thoroughly reviewed will lead to a better managed project. The language used in these documents will provide the basis for which each discipline plans for the project. Documents should be written with clear expectations laid out and meticulous attention to detail. Sometimes in the development of bidding documents, specifications are not reviewed as exhaustively as they should be and items which are cut and pasted from past projects manage to slip by. Vague or incorrect documents lead to an owner getting results that are all over the place. The way each contractor interprets vague information will lead to a less-than equal proposal process. Without document clarity, you will never get an apples-to-apples analysis. Too often contractors who are asked to "bid" a project against one another will interpret vague specifications in self-serving ways that lead to change orders for the owner. If this sounds like a nightmare to you, we would be happy to discuss other approaches that eliminate or at least decrease that possibility.

### Great Expectations.

Last, but certainly not least, is the importance of having realistic expectations for your project. Unfortunately, most projects hit bumps in the road or encounter unforeseen circumstances. The job of your construction team is to help you navigate the process as painlessly as possible. Select a team that you trust and have an open dialogue about your needs and priorities for your project. They will be able to guide you on the ways to best achieve your building goals.

"Planning way ahead is a skill that proves invaluable from the beginning of a project through to the end. Proactively thinking ahead about potential scenarios allows the project to be scheduled and managed in a way that really helps to keep the critical items moving along according to an Owner's time frame and necessary scheduling milestones. Determining how you might handle certain issues should they arise gives you the foresight to plan for the worst and could save a project from sliding out from under you."

- *Jake Moyer, Senior Project Manager*

**We hope you have enjoyed Part II of our Lessons Learned Series.  
Stay tuned for the final installment in early 2020!**

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## Lessons Learned: Part III

### *How to keep your project chugging along toward the finish line!*

With over 130 years' combined experience, our Project Management team has been around the block. We polled them to get the details about their top lessons learned and got so many great pearls of wisdom, we decided to spread it out over a series. Here is the third and final installment.



Project schedules are such a big factor in success of a project. Not only does it drive an owner's ability to move in and begin using their facility when expected, but it can have a huge impact on things like cost, quality, and even safety. Here are our Project Management team's suggestions to keep your project's momentum moving in the right direction.

#### **Expectations set the tone.**

Projects that run most smoothly have one thing in common - realistic expectations. In the construction industry, clear and concise language is critical in ensuring the owner gets the finishes they want. When vague or generalized specifications are thrown together in lieu of taking the time to make focused decisions on things like methods or materials, construction projects can end up looking and feeling very different from a client's expectations. Communication within the team at all levels early in the design process helps streamline the process and keeps everyone on the same page. Having respectful and open conversations with the entire project team allows for questions, clarification, and the transmission of realistic expectations. When in doubt, always ask. Your project team wants you to be happy with the final space! It is much more efficient in terms of both time and money to discuss expectations at the onset of a project, rather than trying to correct a misinformed construction decision or product once it's in motion.

#### **PM TIP:**

"Project documentation is one big way to control the details and iron out misinformation. Think of it as a communication tool to guide the process and clarify expectations. It should open the door to conversations if there is a disconnect between what you want and what the project team thinks you want"

*- Joshua Kaska, Project Manager*

#### **Don't let "FOMO" set in.**

Have you heard of "Fear of Missing Out" or FOMO? It is a very common struggle for people who need to make big decisions, especially when you have to make many of them at once. Indecisiveness can quickly derail a project schedule, particularly once entering the submittal process. While it may be difficult not to go down the path of "FOMO," making conscientious and timely decisions will be a huge determinant in your project being completed on schedule.



According to Horst Project Manager Zachary Weil, “Sometimes a week or two delay on the submittal approval end can equal months of extra lead time on materials. As difficult as it can be, you have to just clear your mind of distractions, determine what you really want, and make the decisions accordingly.”

### Take a step back from emotions.

Emotional investment in construction projects is very common. It shows that you care about your business or organization and the mission you are trying to further by building. The downside to the emotional tie to a project is that it can cloud judgement at times. Much like a bride can become obsessed with very small details when planning her wedding day, sometimes an owner can get so far into the weeds that it’s difficult to see the big picture. Being able to step back, take a breath, and see things from a less emotional perspective often allows new solutions to surface.

“Having a rigid mindset that does not allow for consideration of new ideas or methods means that when something out of the ordinary comes up, time and productivity is lost. Flexibility can make or break a project when something unexpected happens. It is easy to get stuck and have a project’s momentum stall out, “ says Zach Weil, Project Manager. As noted above, having realistic expectations tempers you to the understanding that things will come up during construction.

#### PM TIP:

“Unfortunately, no project runs 100% the way you anticipate, so being flexible and open to necessary changes can really help keep your project moving forward.”

- *Zachary Weil, Project Manager*

#### PM TIP:

“A solid plan and schedule for the submittal process goes a long way in keeping a project’s momentum. Timely and conscientious decisions are key.”

- *Zachary Weil, Project Manager*

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