

OVERVIEW OF THE CONSTRUCTION PROCESS

Construction projects benefit from the involvement of an owner who has a basic working knowledge of how construction works. Our purpose with the following paper is to give you the background information you need to become that owner so that you don't become the person with "one of those construction projects." You already have enough conversational anecdotes for any situation without adding a set about the horrors of construction. And it doesn't need to be that way.

Whether you are building a high rise or remodeling your kitchen, there are certain principles of construction that apply. Assuredly, there can be vast differences in complexity and sophistication, but the underlying principles remain surprisingly constant. So, let's begin.

Doctor-Pharmacist-Patient, an analogy that expresses the roles in construction.

The relationship between architect, contractor and owner can be explained by the analogy of doctor-pharmacist-patient. While there is always a danger in using an analogy this one is so strong it can be taken to the logical extremes and it will still hold up.

The architect is a professional who listens to the owner and prepares a design which responds to his understanding of the owner's needs. This is expressed in drawings and specifications. That is the prescription and, like a doctor, that is where the responsibility for the accurate and proper development and communication of that information lies. Bear in mind that the better the communication by the client/patient the better the work product of the architect/doctor.

The contractor contracts with the owner to build what the architect has placed on the drawings and specifications. If he notices an error he may bring it up for discussion but his true role is to build what is on the drawings without deviation. He fills the prescription. He does not diagnose nor prescribe. If he builds what is in the contract documents he is entitled to be paid when he has completed the work shown in the contract documents just as the pharmacist is entitled to be paid for a properly filled prescription whether or not the patient gets better.

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What an architect does.

The golden rule of construction is communication. My favorite quote from a very successful business person I know is "If you want people to do what is expected of them the very first thing you must do is tell them what is expected of them." So how do you do that?

The architect's services are broadly grouped into schematic design, design development, construction documents and contract administration.

Schematic design is the process of leading the owner through discussions to determine their needs, reviewing the site of the work and developing general ideas and schemes on how a structure could be done to accommodate those needs on that site. The designs can be expressed as sketches, single line drawings or renderings, which are a drawn pictures of how the finished structure will look. This is the foundation of the design. Changing direction after this stage is always possible but it can get very expensive. Be sure you have explored all the viable avenues with your architect before you have them begin the next phase. This is the time to express your goals and absolutes.

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THE FIVE STEPS OF A CONSTRUCTION PROJECT:

Step 1. Determine the goals for the project and the absolutes -- what is it you want to build and why?

Step 2. Picking a contracting method for the project -- there are at least five to choose from.

Step 3. Writing a construction contract -- some do's and don'ts and realities.

Step 4. The construction process -- where the hammer meets the nail.

Step 5. Finishing up -- getting to done.

Good-Fast-Inexpensive. Pick two.

That phrase has been around for a while, but it really does apply to construction. The combinations "good -- fast -- inexpensive" you select may vary from item to item and issue to issue within a single project. You may get elements of all three, but in the end two will predominate and one will recede. Let's examine why.

High quality in a short period of time takes resources. That means larger firms with more overhead and that means more expense. Now you could get lucky and, in the right market, find someone with underutilized resources who would give you a bargain price for high quality on a short time frame. You might get all three assuming no other work comes their way to divert them to a more profitable project. This also illustrates one of the principles of

construction—there are no absolutes. There are general principles and trends but there are no absolutes.

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