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Budgeting for construction administration services a must

Construction might be the most gratifying stage of any project; often it also is the most challenging. You might think an architect would prefer the design phase. After all, it is the most creative part of the process and holds almost no liability. But a good architect relishes the construction process. It is the culmination of the architect's design, the team's collaboration and the owner's commitment. Weeks, months, sometimes even years, have gone into problem solving, research and documentation. It is critical to a project's success that the full team is at the client's disposal during construction. Yet frequently a client will request that we perform limited construction administration services or, worse, delete them altogether. In such budget-conscious times, clients are often trying to save money any way they can. They might think they can handle construction administration themselves or are under the impression that CA is the general contractor's responsibility. You've heard the old phrase: "Penny-wise, pound-foolish." It's a tremendous gamble with potentially expensive consequences.

Studies show that most litigation can be traced to breakdowns in communication between the client and the architect. Eliminating CA services only magnifies that possibility and can create greater risks for the client outside of those directly associated with bricks and



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mortar. Finer legal points aside, there are myriad examples on every project illustrating the value of keeping the design team involved throughout construction. Consider a recent restaurant project on which the client rejected CA services. In reaction to the cost of the electrical service upgrade, the client changed equipment specifications without consulting the team and directed the contractor to revise the service design. What the client did not realize was that the specs and design had been carefully studied and the upgrade cost had been accounted for in the overall budget. Neither the contractor nor his electrical subcontractor had the ability to make this change without drawings so we helped shepherd it through. But for the lack of simple, timely communication, the client incurred the cost of the equipment changes, increased wiring costs, engineering add-service fees, a schedule delay and ultimately lost significant efficiency on his kitchen equipment over its lifetime.

With the ever-growing and esoteric nature of code, ADA and LEED requirements, it is unrealistic and unfair to expect

general contractors to fully understand the implications of changes in the field. A colleague recently shared how a substitution of mechanical equipment during construction unraveled a long list of LEED criteria associated with the building systems and controls. Had this not been caught by the engineer during shop submittals, the project's certification status would have been jeopardized. In another instance a client and contractor generated their own design revision to "improve" a project's entrance. After a brief review, we determined that the new entry violated both ADA and egress requirements and had to be revised. The project already was tight on money and time; the result was a waste of both.

In technical terms the architect isn't administering *construction*, rather he or she is administering the *construction contract*. The architect reviews the contractor's work to make sure the project is being completed in accordance with the construction documents. On one recent office tenant improvement project, the contractor had not provided a number of miscellaneous items listed in the project specifications (interior blinds, fire extinguishers, coat hooks, etc.). The contractor indicated that he considered the specifications to be "general notes" and "assumed they didn't apply to this project." Had we not been closely involved, these items would have been missed and

the client would not have been provided with the full scope included in the construction documents. This catch alone offset the entire cost of CA services for the project.

Sometimes it's as simple as quantifying the direct and indirect value of a client's time. In lieu of a \$2,500 CA fee on an office remodel, a client opted out of CA services because he was already going to be on site during construction. At the end of the project, I asked him how he felt it went. He admitted that while he'd spent more time dealing with the construction than he'd anticipated, he still thought it was the right decision. When asked to compare the fee with the time spent at his billable rate, the savings was actually a wash. When asked about the sales or client contacts he might have made otherwise with that time ... suddenly it wasn't a good deal at all. And the insult to injury was that he still incurred hourly fees for items that were out of his expertise.

You might not be in sales, but what terms put it in perspective for you? Will your clients be served? Your staff managed? Your widgets made? And maybe in the simplest of terms, do you need the extra stress?

Good, professional architects and engineers can provide value to a project in construction far beyond their fees. Peace of mind alone may be worth it.▲