



Vision Project Management Approach

By Tommy H. Moss

At the APPA 2007 annual meeting in Baltimore, I attended a session where data collected by Brigham Young University students was presented with regard to contracting processes, including types of contracts and when different contracts should be utilized. There was no consensus on the type of contract that should be used, since some people like one type over another. It made me stop and think about what makes a successful project. In my 36 years of construction I have been involved with thousands of projects, each with a different type of contracting process including straight bid, design-build, construction management/general contractor, negotiated, and everything in between. I have discovered that the type of contracting process does not determine the success of the project, it only aids in schedule control, cost control, and quality control.

So what will make a successful project? First, the project must be defined. Second, the available funds must match the defined scope of the project. Last, and most importantly, there must be a project manager or owner representative who leads the process.

What are the attributes of a project manager or owner representative who leads? I use the word **VISION** to describe leadership qualities of a project manager or owner representative.

V – Visualization – the act or process of interpreting in visual terms

I – Intertwine – to become mutually involved

S – Strategist – the art of devising or employing plans toward a goal

I – Ignition – the act of motivating/ exciting the team

O – Originality – freshness of aspect, design, and/or style

N – Knowledge – the fact or condition of knowing something with a familiarity gained through experience or association

VISUALIZATION

Before the project manager secures the designer or contractor, the manager should visualize what he or she wants out of the project. Examples: no value engineering, fast track or not, happy client, cohesive team, LEED gold, or doing a great job.

Visualization helps the project manager (you) think through issues that are most important to the clients, the owners, the team, and you. If you can visualize it, you can make it hap-

pen because you have a map to follow. Stop and visualize your dream vehicle. Do you see it? Can you use it for work? Does it fit the family's needs? Is it good for long trips? How is the gas mileage? Is it in line with your budget? How will all of these questions and factors assist in your visualization?

Visualization helps define the different parameters of how your map has various routes to reach your vision, plus it may give you a different outcome. The other key in visualization is seeing what success is. If you can see success, you can define it. A simple example is when you want a green and sustainable building: you can use LEED standards to determine the level of certification. [The Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design standards are developed by the U.S. Green Building Council (www.usgbc.org).] Time of completion can be determined, and then you can guide everyone to that date. You need to define the user-level expectations with each building. You need to define the parameters up front that will determine the final outcome of your project.

Example from the Diagnostic Medicine Center Project:

- Conducted meetings with the owner, architect, and contractor before there was a true design.
- Used the concept of team work to define quality, cost, and size of a building in the beginning of project meetings on the scope, instead of waiting until the conclusion of schematic design to determine if we had a project we could build.
- Subcontractors were brought in early to gain their input and advice on systems.
- As a team, we developed Cost Study Reports on building finish systems, electrical/mechanical approaches, and different structure approaches.
- Using the parameters set in the early stages of the project, design development should be within budget as this phase begins.
- I'm glad I am not doing major value engineering or redesign because it will delay the project, although these processes can also help build team relationships.

INTERTWINE

To intertwine all the individuals to a project is tough due to different views, desires, and requirements. I have learned to “sell” the big picture – not just the pieces – to all interested parties of a project. I know that no matter the

amount of funds or the quality, it is not enough for some people. In my many years I have not had unlimited budgets. You need to first believe in the vision yourself. Have you ever seen a salesperson who does not believe in the product? Did you buy the product? I don’t

think so! To intertwine a group I try to lead them to be completely enthusiastic about the “vision.” Remember, you must sell the overall vision.

One area of concern that usually must be addressed is between contractors and the design team. Most contracting processes set them up in a check-and-balance system that can become an adversarial relationship. You, the owner representative or project manager, will have work to build mutual respect and trust between the two. It takes meetings and your guidance to make it happen. Never let them force you to choose a side; in front of the user or client you must be a team. Again, you are selling the *project* vision and not an individual’s vision.

My latest project was the Diagnostic Medicine Center for the College of Veterinary Medicine and Biomedical Sciences at Colorado State University. The overall vision for this specific project was to become the number one veterinary program in the country. I was able to successfully create a primary vision for individuals on this project (becoming number one) and to look at their specific areas as secondary. We were not building a Diagnostic Medicine Center, but a stepping stone to becoming the number one veterinary program in the country. This approach allows you to ask the interested parties if they would like to help the team accomplish the vision.

STRATEGIST

If you are an owner representative or project manager you are already a strategist: good, bad, or otherwise. You decide on how to manage the project. The project will be built, but there are ways to become more efficient and “artful.” Don’t let the process drive your project. Defining your goals will define your success. You also must continue looking ahead to avoid issues. For example, your project gets caught by bad weather: Did you look ahead and have a contingency plan for bad weather, or are you telling



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everyone you have to delay the project for a month? If you know you are building over the winter, did the architect put in winterization requirements for you? Do you watch the contractor pay applications for the amount of work completed?

You can compare amount of work completed to the contractor's cashflow chart (which you should have requested at the beginning of the project). This is a simple chart that tells you if the contractor has spent adequate funds to cover the staffing needs of the project. A key strategy should be to have measurable goals that determine success along the way (outside of finishing the project.) At the end of the project you should check these goals to determine if you were successful with the project.

IGNITION

You are the ignition on the project. Without you nothing happens. Let's go back to the vehicle you were dreaming about earlier. What makes it go? The ignition. There is a great deal of power in the engine, but it takes a small piece of equipment to ignite the engine. You must lead the way. You must keep the team excited. You must make it fun for you and the team of architects, engineers, landscape architects, contractors, clients, and users. You are the person that will help the team stay focused on the vision of the project, so that goals are set and met.

ORIGINALITY

To be able to keep projects moving and going you need originality in your thinking. As an owner representative or project manager you need to think outside the box. You need to look at new approaches that may be suggested. You are the one leading the charge on a new path.

When I started using these rather unusual processes on this project I had a lot of doubters. Today I have everyone asking what we are doing different because we are so successful with the architects

and contractor. I dare you to take a risk and think beyond the process.

KNOWLEDGE

Your knowledge will equip you to select the right process, make decisions on strategies, team members, contractors, designers, and goals. Years of experience will add to your knowledge. Use your education and daily experiences to help you. Find a mentor you can learn from by talking to them about situations/issues and using their knowledge to help you decide what to do. Leverage the knowledge of all members of the team in decision making.

One early lesson I learned in my life was from the dad of a friend I worked for. I was framing up walls and we had just finished nailing down a sheet of plywood to the frame. The dad came over and used a square at the corner. Of course it wasn't square! He made us take every nail out and do it right. I

asked him after we were done why we had to redo the job. He said, "You need to think about what you are doing, and I want you to do it right the first time. I know you won't ever forget it because you just pulled 300 nails out, which is no easy task." So, to this day, I stop and think before I start whatever I do because it is a lot harder to change afterwards. Knowledge comes to you from many directions. Apply what you have to your project.

Do you have the VISION to lead the design and construction process for your college, university, or institution? enVISION yourself doing it! ☺

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