

Your Qualities Drive Relationship Quality

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6 COMMON BEHAVIORS THAT FOSTER SUCCESS IN BOTH THE TECHNICAL & RELATIONAL ASPECTS OF CONSTRUCTION

The construction industry is one of the oldest in the world. It began when humans developed the ability to reason: the cognitive ability to draw a conclusion based on the experience or use of tools or other available material. Early humans reasoned that rocks could be transformed and used as a tool, and thus built the first condominiums, then called caves. Ever since, construction has been a reflection of a society's technology and values.

Quality has its own definition in the world of construction. I believe the definition of quality in the world of construction is "adherence to requirements." It's not simply that an implementation of better or best equals superiority. Quality continues to be a subjective interpretation of what's in the mind of the beholder (the observing customer) and the beholder (the obligated contractor).

Success in construction depends on many common factors, no matter where you live or what type of construction services you provide. The factors for success are consistent whether you are an architect, engineer, general contractor, subcontractor or material supplier. They apply if your company is big or small, young or old. The six common qualities for great success as a general contractor include:



1. Dogged Persistence

Construction requires toughness, persistence, and taking risks. It's the will to succeed and a strong drive for competition that gets you there, not the unreasonable, overly optimistic Pollyanna approach. The competition is such that second place is reserved for the first loser. Survival requires the resiliency of a rubber band, snapping back from being overstretched. After being bested from a project award, a resilient contractor can allow only a brief period of remorse before moving on to get the next project. It hurts to work hard and still experience failure, and the cycle can be relentless.

2. Respect & Realization

Successful contractors realize that customer loyalty is not automatically granted. It is earned. They understand that project management is important, but customer relationships are more important. They know that their best strategic plan

includes respect and problem solving, and the worst strategic plan is finger-pointing and betrayal. They are also mature enough to realize that problems do not go away, but do provide a great opportunity to look good once they are solved. Meanwhile, competitors are always waiting in the wings. They watch for you to make a misstep. They wait for the opportunity to fly in after you've crashed and take off with your customers.

3. High Expectations

Success in life is about the constant creation and achievement of expectations. Setting expectations leads to motivation. Achieving expectations fosters pride and confidence to start the cycle over again: create, achieve, create, achieve, etc.

High expectation is a discipline that keeps you from the temptation of just doing okay. Keeping up with a competitor, but not doing anything better, will eventually lead to failure. Fifteen minutes of charm may get you in the door, but skill is necessary to keep you there. I have never heard of anyone getting a contract because they had the nicest brochure.

4. Negotiation Skills

Good negotiation requires a special attentiveness to your fight-or-flight impulse – you have to keep your emotions intact and in check. Be prepared and willing to give something up. Such a concession will allow the other party to feel like they've earned something and got a piece of you, even though you may have been willing to give it away free prior to the negotiation even starting.

5. Unconventional Assessment Thinking

It doesn't cost anything to think in unconventional ways to arrive at new assessments. Unconventional assessment thinking (UAT) is about getting out of the rut of your usual business mode and allowing yourself to see your world from a higher elevation. Permit your head to absorb rather than deflect the new ideas and opportunities that often blaze past you while you are stuck in the rut. Maybe it's because people often tend to think more about stabilization and security and not enough about growth and opportunity. But as a business

owner, it is essential that you plan ahead.


6. Humanitarian Efforts

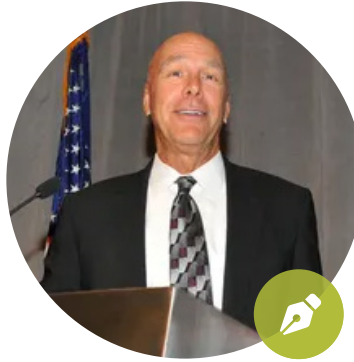
Doing something to benefit other people gives you balance and helps you realize how lucky you are. Construction companies have the people, tools, equipment, and know-how to build humanitarian projects. If you take these projects on, they will widen the hearts of employees and reinforce your company values. They will also have a distinctive impact on your reputation.

Perhaps most importantly, successful contractors are trusted and trusting. Yes, you can be financially successful by not being trustworthy, but that is not what defines success. Instead, being untrustworthy is one of the main prerequisites for failure. The construction industry is also difficult because there are few people who can thrive on the treadmill of urgency, which dispenses constant deadline and revenue pressure, while simultaneously demanding swift decision-making in a competitive arena. As James Moynihan of Henry International points out in Engineering News Record's book, "Horizons," "It requires a unique combination of math, personality, psychology, intelligence, common sense, architecture, engineering, and project management as well as hard mental and physical work."

Managing Relationships

Despite all the gains in technology, the construction industry remains relationship driven. People might think that construction is mostly about brick and mortar, but, in fact, it's as much about relationships as any business. There are few people who are proficient at both the technical and the relational aspects of construction, yet, being good at both is necessary to succeed at, and enjoy, the business.

Although construction processes have changed over time, the humans at the center of the construction industry have not changed that much. In construction, relationships include trust and betrayal, pleasure and pain, satisfaction and disappointment. These all lead to the ultimate success or failure at the end of a construction project. That, in turn, leads to whether or not your company will be invited to work on the next project. 



About the Author

Joe Egan is president of Egan Connection Inc., a construction consulting, coaching and training company, and also president of Egan Publications Inc. for the authorship and publication of his two books: “The General Contractor – How to be a Great Success or Failure” and “Building Positive Character – Over 50 Tips on Empowerment, Overcoming and Success.” Egan is also an adjunct professor at Minnesota State University School of Construction Management. Visit joeegan.com.

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