

Member Communication Experience

A Competitive Advantage: Why Speed Matters in Construction Management

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The construction industry has long had a reputation for delays. Countless projects never break ground - not due to a lack of funding or poor design - but because they die the slow death of indecision, procrastination, and inaction. While projects stall for many reasons, moving at speed addresses most of them. In construction, speed matters.

Whether decision-making, planning, execution, delivering bad news, or solving problems, timely action drives results. Reed Hastings, co-founder of Netflix, captures this well: "Companies rarely die from moving too fast, and they frequently die from moving too slowly."¹ Moving quickly doesn't mean being reckless, it means making informed decisions even when the picture isn't perfect and having the confidence to act.

The old adage holds true in construction: "A good decision made quickly is better than a great decision made too late."

SPEED REQUIRES COMPETENCE

Speed alone isn't impressive, it's risky. What makes it powerful is competence. Fast, strategic decision-making requires real skill, sharp judgment, and experience that runs deep.

Think of high-output construction management like driving a Formula One car. You're flying down the track at over 200 mph. You have to know when to throttle, brake, corner, and shift, with precision. One wrong move, and you're on the wall.

Construction is no different. It's high-pressured, fast-paced, and unforgiving. You're managing client expectations, scope



changes, design issues, budget constraints, schedule slippage, and quality risks, often all at once. The key is keeping control while driving forward at speed. That's not chance, it's competence in action.

Take Tesla's Gigafactory in Shanghai. From site selection to vehicle production, the facility was operational in under a year - an unheard-of timeline for a project of that scale. It wasn't a rush job. It resulted from meticulous planning, tight coordination, expedited approvals, and confident, well-informed decisions. Speed didn't compromise quality, it enabled it.²

When construction managers know their craft and are empowered to act, speed becomes a strategic advantage, not a liability.

PROGRESS OVER PARALYSIS

Waiting for perfect information is a luxury most projects can't afford. Construction doesn't stop while every detail gets clarified, and the cost of hesitation can rival the cost of a wrong call. The truth is, many of the best decisions are made with 70% of the data and 100% accountability.

A powerful example is the rapid conversion of New York City's Javits Center into a field hospital during the early days of COVID-19. With hospitals overwhelmed, construction teams had to act fast. There was no time to analyze every variable or wait for perfect clarity. Crews made real-time decisions under pressure, working with incomplete information, and still delivered. It wasn't flawless, but it was effective.

That's the point. You're rarely choosing between right and wrong. You're choosing between right now and too late.

Construction leaders who can navigate uncertainty and still move forward are the ones who keep projects alive and on track.

THE BIGGEST RISK ISN'T MAKING A MISTAKE

The real threat in construction isn't making a mistake, it's standing still. Fear of failure often holds teams back, but in today's environment, marked by fierce competition, rising costs, tightening regulations, and fast-changing technology, hesitation is more dangerous than action. The first to move gains the upper hand.

Just look at Prologis, one of the most successful industrial developers in the world. Their ability to move quickly - from site acquisition to building turnover - is a key reason for their market leadership. They've streamlined internal workflows, empowered field teams, and built strong relationships with cities and contractors to reduce friction and accelerate delivery. Do they make mistakes? Sure. But they treat them as part of the process - learning, adjusting, and moving forward without slowing down.


The professionals and companies at the top didn't get there by avoiding failure. They got there by embracing speed, owning outcomes, and improving faster than their competition.

Mistakes are not setbacks. They're tuition, an investment in becoming sharper, faster, and more capable than the team still stuck in analysis mode.

CONCLUSION: OWN THE PACE, LEAD THE PROJECT

Speed is not the enemy of quality - hesitation is. In construction management, those who lead decisively, act competently, and embrace calculated risk consistently outperform those who wait. As our industry faces tighter timelines, rising costs, and increasing complexity, the ability to move with clarity and confidence is no longer a nice to have, it's a must.

That's why continuing to sharpen your skills, expand your knowledge, and grow your professional network matters. Organizations like CMAA exist to equip construction managers with the tools, training, and community needed to lead at speed - without sacrificing quality.

So, own the pace. Set the tone. Be the one who moves first, adapts quickly, and drives progress. In this business, speed isn't just a tactic - it's your competitive advantage. 



About the Author

Vito Carlin is an award-winning senior preconstruction manager with Amazon's Global Engineering Services, where he supports design and construction initiatives across North America. With 18 years of experience, Vito has led cost management efforts on more than \$2.5 billion in vertical construction, totaling over 10 million square feet of developed assets and more than 4,000 units. His career highlights include contributing to the transformation of Downtown Los Angeles' skyline, where he was part of the team behind five landmark towers across from the iconic Staples Center, home of the Los Angeles Lakers.

References

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