

The Missing Piece In Construction Success: It's Not Strategy. It's Personality.

Written by: Bill Wagner, Author of *The Entrepreneur Next Door*

For more than two decades, I've worked with thousands of business owners across industries – from construction CEOs and regional contractors to franchise operators and venture backed founders. And while their job titles and project scopes may differ, one insight remains true:

Business success is 80 percent behavioral and only 20 percent strategic.

In construction, we spend a lot of time building project timelines, reviewing P and Ls, and planning for growth. But here's what most construction leaders overlook: personality fit – yours and your team's – is the single biggest predictor of long-term business performance.

WHY SO MANY CONSTRUCTION LEADERS BURN OUT

Every week in the construction world, someone moves from the field into management. A strong superintendent becomes a director. A detail focused estimator is asked to run operations. Sometimes it works. Often it doesn't.

And it's not about intelligence or effort.

Most of the time, it's a personality mismatch.

Over a five-year study, my firm surveyed more than 1,500 successful entrepreneurs and executives, most under age 40, all running companies with over one million dollars in annual revenue. Despite the diversity in industries, over 80 percent shared a similar behavioral profile – high dominance, low



formality, and a comfort with uncertainty. They were not just good with strategy. They were wired to lead, take risks, and pivot fast.

Now here's the hard truth: when someone's personality does not align with their role's behavioral demands, things break down fast. Energy drops. Mistakes happen. Stress builds. And people burn out.

THE FIVE TIER PERFORMANCE PYRAMID

To make this practical, I developed a framework we use often in construction consulting. It's called the Performance Pyramid:

- 1. Tier I: Personality** – Who are you, really? This is your wiring. You cannot fake it for long.
- 2. Tier II: Job Behaviors** – What does your role demand behaviorally?

3. Tier III: Daily Actions – What must you consistently do to succeed?

4. Tier IV: Metrics – How do you measure progress?

5. Tier V: Results – What outcomes are you expected to deliver?

Most leaders in construction jump straight to Tier IV and V – metrics and results – without checking if the job aligns with someone’s core personality. But if those bottom tiers are misaligned, no KPI dashboard will save you.

CASE IN POINT: THE MISPLACED OPS LEADER

One of my clients – let’s call him Mike – was running a successful mid-size commercial construction firm. We promoted one of his best project managers into an operations director role. He was bright, likeable, organized, and respected on site. But within six months, things started to slide. Turnover increased. Delays crept in. Morale dipped.

We ran a behavioral assessment. It turns out, Mike had a cautious personality and preferred predictability. But the role demanded fast decision making, strategic delegation, and the ability to manage ambiguity.

Mike wasn’t broken. He was just misaligned.

We placed him in a senior preconstruction role and brought in a more decisive, big picture leader for ops. The team stabilized. The work flowed. Revenue climbed. Not because we “trained harder” – but because we matched the right people with the right behavioral demands.

WHY THIS MATTERS RIGHT NOW

Today’s construction landscape is unforgiving – rising costs, labor shortages, supply chain volatility, and demanding owners. We simply cannot afford friction at the top.

Misalignment is not just expensive. It’s fatal.

That is why smart construction firms are moving away from hiring based on resumes or gut instinct. Instead, they are embracing behavioral role fit as a standard part of leadership and team development.

FOUR TAKEAWAYS FOR CONSTRUCTION LEADERS

1. Assess Personality Before You Promote

Before handing someone the keys to a new division or team, define the behavioral demands of the role. Then assess whether the candidate’s wiring matches.

2. Manage the Behavioral Gap

If someone is not a natural fit, they can still succeed – but only if they are aware of the gap and supported through coaching. Unacknowledged misalignment leads to stress and stagnation.

3. Do Not Confuse Skill With Fit

Someone can have all the certifications and technical knowledge in the world and still underperform if their natural style is at odds with the job.

4. Lead Yourself First

The best construction leaders understand their own wiring. They build org charts, hiring processes, and leadership habits that match – not fight – their own tendencies.

FINAL THOUGHT: THE GOLDILOCKS PRINCIPLE IN CONSTRUCTION

There is no perfect personality. But there is a right fit for each role.

Too dominant, and a leader may bulldoze the team. Too passive, and decisions stall. The magic happens when personality, job behavior, and daily action align – when it all feels “just right.”


So if you are a construction leader wondering why a project director is struggling...

Why your meetings are draining...

Why your A players are leaving...

The problem may not be in your strategy.

It may be in your psychology.

And it’s time to get that part right. 



About the Author

Bill Wagner is the founder of [Accord Management Systems](#) and author of *The Entrepreneur Next Door*, a research based guide to success through personality alignment. His firm helps construction companies build scalable, high performing teams using EOS implementation and behavioral assessments.

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