

Managing Growth into a Dynamic Future

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“It’s worked this way for so long ... why change it now?”

– Said the man rubbing two sticks together in an attempt to conjure fire.



If I learned anything studying philosophy as an undergrad, it was that our brains are uncomfortable with our own duality. While we totally comprehend the necessity and benefits of positive change, our minds fight against the acceptance of that change with all hands on deck. I’ll give you a perfect example; I’m uncomfortable right now as I sit and type this piece. My chair is old and I need a new one and that has been the case for about two years.

That is certainly an anecdote for the main hurdle. Our own predilection toward the solid, proven methods we have embraced for so long leaves us unmotivated to alter what we know works. But a very smart man once told me: “Your business and its systems work perfectly for the way you currently operate.” This was a cruel and subtle way of telling me that we were failing at the bigger picture ... we needed to build a business that could work well into the dynamic future.

So, we had the kick-in-the-head moment. Now what? What do we need to change, embrace and let go of? Internally, we chose to make a concerted effort to jump outside our own conventions and the same old ideas. We wanted to jump head-long into the future. Little did we know just how much would change.

First order of business was to adopt and implement a sincere and serious health and safety culture. The industry has seen a paradigm shift in the focus on health and safety, and we decided that the only way to move forward was to become a partner in establishing the new standard. We implemented protocol that would help us lower our risk exposure and limit the amount of injuries within our company. I was promoted to safety director and became immediately responsible for the development of the programs. I began to mimic the culture of our more sophisticated clients and identified some key practices that we were able to make our own. Daily job hazard analysis (JHA) has helped our people hold each other accountable for successful and meaningful hazard analysis and planning. Daily stretch and bend has reduced our exposure to soft tissue injuries significantly. I complete weekly onsite safety audits in which I investigate the site from top to bottom with that project’s superintendent to help him see hazards through a different set of lenses. We implemented a strong focus on near –

miss reporting and root-cause analysis so we could learn from harmless incidents rather than reacting to injuries. Our training certification tracking log went from nearly empty to nearly full as we invested deeply into the education of our employees to give them the tools they needed to make good decisions on their own. We invested heavily into the real application of safety as a cultural change. The effectiveness of the policies and paperwork became a byproduct of the cultural shift and has become a cornerstone of our daily success.



We also took a serious look at our field quality control. We quickly discovered that measures and controls were lacking or minimal. Rather than pour out funds to hire more managers to inspect the work, we worked from within to create a few key solutions. First, we invested time and resources into the effective training of our installers. We began tracking our product awareness and knowledge by way of attendance and certifications from manufacturer training seminars. We sent key employees out of state for week-long trainings on installation techniques. We used our all-hand's safety meetings as an opportunity to also discuss weekly quality-control tips.

We also knew that something had to change with our reporting methods, because there was just too much happening every day to see with our own eyes. So we looked to developing technologies to assist us. We began using visual reporting software to document daily installation issues and successes. We are able to effectively file away visual reports that are time-stamped and sorted by project for any potential future needs.

As the construction environment became supremely busy, we began to see that our communications methods were archaic and time-intensive. We centralized our job information on a shareable server-based technology solution. We were then able to utilize our new project management software to share production and efficiency reports with the field supervision in real-time. Submittals, estimates, work orders, purchase orders, etc., all became shared on a protected server accessible via smartphones carried by all of our field supervisors.

The flood of construction projects had its own share of unintended byproducts. Construction schedules seemed to get tighter as contractors bid more competitively. Timetables were condensed and effective project planning became of premium importance. Rather than fight against the changing tide, we hired a field coordination manager and promoted our senior estimator to business operations executive. The primary goal of these two

key management roles was to assist the contractor and client in effective planning and coordination to ease the construction schedule and promote the continued focus on safety and quality. We aim to never sacrifice either of those two key tenants of an enduring business for the sake of productivity or efficiency. The implementation of our new coordination methods allowed our installers to stay focused on safely installing a high-quality product by easing their number or required items of focus. The superintendents and journeymen could now maintain efficient workflows without having to think about equipment maintenance, material procurement and other logistical items that are now handled by our operations management team.

Our high-quality standard extends beyond the scope and timeframe of an active project. We embraced technological advancements once again, and our testing methods became much more meaningful and enduring. With the implementation of Electronic Field Vector Mapping, we have been able to reduce our risk and turn over a much-more effective waterproofing than ever allowed by conventional testing methods such as flood tests.

More work and more employees meant more supervision. We are very proud of our general policy of promoting from within, as 85 percent of our



field supervision and upper management have been promoted from within our existing workforce. The dedication and loyalty shown by these key employees has reinforced our belief that every business is only ever as good as those who grind and labor every day on the frontlines.

When we did need to go outside our own labor pool, we searched high and low for the best estimators in the industry. The hiring process for these two very important employees was long and intensive. We needed to be sure the new crew of project estimators would offer the same high level of service, timeliness and accuracy of scope and cost inclusions that was planted by our president and cemented in place by our long-time senior estimator and current operations executive.

With all of the added employees, human resources became a daunting and exhausting task for our existing management. A director was hired to ease the strain on our existing management and to more effectively manage our work comp cases, the changing insurance requirements and other logistical management issues. This has proven to be an invaluable decision.

Changes in the industry began to affect the very nature of the construction business in Denver. The litigious nature of condominium building began to tip the scales too far in the wrong direction and they became cost-prohibitive to even bid.

For more than 18 years, our president has developed a very sophisticated contract review process incorporating all of his education and experience. His knowledge has allowed us to identify these types of risks and mitigate them through negotiations. Much of this education has been provided by the American Subcontractor's Association of Colorado (ASAC). The ASAC Attorney's Council is responsible for the educative content solicited through great events like the Business Practice Interchange and monthly Contract Study courses hosted by the ASAC.

At the end of the day, all of these policies and standards have combined in synergy to produce one enduring result: We are better, and we will keep getting better. Moving forward, we are currently identifying and vetting new potential client relationships. We aim to partner with contractors and builders that believe in the same long-term business plan we embrace ... the belief that doing things the right way will pay out over a long enough timeline. We believe that while it may cost more to be accurate, and it may take more time to focus on safety and quality, meaningful and long-lasting client relationships are always based on mutual respect. Retaining clients and employees is dependent on our ability to make people proud to call us a partner ... and that is something I am proud to say we will never change.

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