



You've Got the Job ... Now What?

Why preparation is king



BY GARRETT J. SULLIVAN

Most seasoned construction executives learned long ago about the 80/20 rule of construction. The rule is simple—80 percent of the job costs occur before the first 20 percent of the job is completed. As the contractor, you're immediately responsible for awarding subcontracts, buying materials and doing all of the set up work. Therefore, the prudent contractor preplans his projects.

Preplanning involves the systematic strategy for achieving quality, lowest cost, safety and timely completion.

Essentially, preplanning brings the future into the present. This allows you to intervene in any situation that may cause you trouble in the future. Regardless of project size, I recommend that all contractors hold a transfer meeting where the estimating department turns over the project to field operations. This meeting—or series of meetings, depending on the size of the project—should specifically outline the nuances of the job and assumptions made by the estimating team when bidding for the job.

To ensure success, I recommend your preplanning meeting(s) include these 10 action items:

- **Assign key personnel.** Every job needs a team leader. Depending on the size of the job, you may also need a project manager. Others to include would be the estimator, superintendent, key foremen and subcontractors.
 - **Visit the jobsite.** Have the operations team visit the jobsite early and often to envision the job to be built. Take notes, pictures and video of the site topography, logical traffic flow, surrounding areas and roadway access.
 - **Conduct a brainstorming session.** Identify which tasks need to be completed under each major heading. Identify who will complete each of these tasks and by when.
 - **Prepare all subcontracts and purchase orders.** Within a week of the apparent low bid by a contractor, all subcontracts and purchase orders should be prepared. By standardizing this practice you are able to find any errors in your bid. This is also the time when all the fine details of the bid are fresh in the estimator's mind and can be incorporated into the contract documents.
 - **Review the budget/estimate.** The budget/estimate review helps to validate the bid and pinpoints the strengths and weaknesses of the estimate. Superintendents and foremen should be encouraged to provide feedback to validate labor and equipment estimates.
 - **Review project equipment and personnel requirements.** Being able to accurately assess the available personnel and equipment of the project improves the efficiency and safety of the job.
- **Produce the draft schedule.** On larger projects a "quick and dirty" schedule should be prepared as a part of the bid process to ensure there is adequate time to complete the project in the time allotted. After award, this schedule should continue to be refined until it is agreed to by all parties to the job.
 - **Develop a schedule.** This schedule breaks down the job into the 16 divisions of work as well as: purchasing, submittals, safety and quality and general/administrative.
 - **Analyze production.** This process is called step level planning and it breaks down each and every task of the job into component parts. Ideally, when the job is started, the planned production is reviewed on a daily basis with the crew in a 15-minute superintendent meeting.
 - **Identify and purchase critical materials.** Buy long lead items early to avoid unnecessary delays in the schedule.

Why conduct preplanning? Your benefits include an increase in job morale, a whole new level of understanding of the work, developing better project managers/engineers and breaking down the barrier between the office and the field.

Preplanning is probably the single most important event in the success of the project. By making this a best practice in your company, you will save time and money and the results will show up on your bottom line. **BI**

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