

WMCA Takes Advice On Adding Value



At its recent membership meeting the Western Michigan Construction Alliance heard how contractors can add value to a construction project, a theme developed by Bruce Burgess of Wolverine Building Group of Grand Rapids.

In a very competitive market where the low bid can be difficult to overcome, Burgess said companies that can add more value to the services they provide can gain more attention from the project owners, construction managers, and general contractors that hire them. High on the list should be the ability to team with other contractors and working with them to uncover opportunities that allow the pursuit of mutually beneficial projects.

Teaming can take a number of forms, some casual and others more organized, leading up to formal joint ventures. A company that develops a strong reputation for being able to team up with others to meet a complex challenge on a construction site will gain a highly beneficial reputation. That reputation can spell the difference between making a short list or falling off one.

The rapidly increasing importance three dimensional modeling, particularly in the form of Building Information Modeling (BIM), can't be dismissed, Burgess said. The highly visual process allows contractors to readily predict how major systems may conflict with other systems during project planning. In a PowerPoint presentation he showed how a pressurized pipe would have run into ductwork had it not been caught by three dimensional modeling. BIM has also been used to eliminate unnecessary design redundancies, thereby reducing costs.

Thanks to intelligent technology, the old construction method of design-bid-build has pretty much disappeared. Burgess added that with so many architectural firms trying to minimize their risk in the design phase, some project owners are hiring construction managers first, then having their CMs hire the architect. The approach minimizes risk and legal issues.

Another avenue open to contractors to add value is to obtain skills in sustainable construction as well as the U.S. Green Building Council's Leadership in Energy & Environmental Design (LEED) certification program. Project owners are increasingly demanding these concepts be applied to their buildings, if just to reduce utility and operating costs.

Turning to union construction training programs, Burgess spoke highly of them. He provided illustrations where his own training was enhanced because he completed apprenticeship training through the organized construction industry. But at the same time he spoke of the need for changes in union construction labor, to keep pace where contractors are going.

Burgess said construction labor must work to add value to its efforts just as contractors should. He provided examples where work rules could be changed, ethics enhanced, and professionalism improved, all geared toward adding tremendous value to the construction process.

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