

# 5 Steps to Better Project Communication



## How your company culture is affecting customer satisfaction & litigation risk

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There's a common quip in the construction industry: A badly planned project will take three times longer than expected, while a well-planned project takes only twice as long as expected.

Though many expectations of construction projects are based on this concept, there are proactive steps that contractors can take to reduce the litigation risks that arise and create such delays during the construction process.

Often, construction managers take an informal approach to potential conflicts, avoiding communicating about problems in the hope they will be resolved or minimized before deadlines

are affected. But, developing a stronger company culture through project planning puts the framework in place to address disruptions and defects immediately so that they can be remedied timely and effectively.

The process of creating a construction project plan needs to be as thoroughly undertaken as the project itself. Each step toward completion should be contingent on the successful execution of the one before it.

While some contractors take a detached approach in which each stage, from preplanning to finish, has its own checklist, a culture of “process connectivity” strategy takes the long view. By developing a more cohesive planning process, companies can enhance performance and reduce litigation risk.

Too many project managers are focused on specific tasks and on moving to the next one as quickly as possible. The pressure to hit deadlines and avoid additional charges pushes the crew forward with the mistaken notion that any deficiencies that arise can be cleaned up in the end. These shortcomings often represent a significant disconnect between the project's end goal and the people who are decision-makers.

However, process connectivity encourages the team to apply foresight and anticipate potential claims categories to help eliminate surprises over the course of the work. Identifying weaknesses during preplanning is a straightforward way to put the company and managers in a better position to adapt and adjust.

One example that can create delays is the inability of contractors to provide sufficient skilled workers across the industry. Contractors and developers take on greater risk with crews that are too small and/or ill prepared for proper and timely installations.

Rather than ignoring this deficit, management should have their personnel well-trained before a job begins and have foremen in place to keep the crew on track for adherence to good construction practices.

This may seem like a sizeable investment, but the commitment is a difference maker in reducing the number of costly claims and how they're resolved. The following are five concepts to help move from a process of detachment and reduce litigation risk:

1. *Take the long view on projects*—Consider the whole project before you begin any stage of planning. Design each stage according to its impact on the end result so that nothing gets lost or downplayed as work progresses.

2. *Embrace a realistic timeline during preplanning*—Submitting a proposal for a rushed building process is a sure way to create conflict. Focusing all of your team's attention on creating a winning bid ignores the upcoming work in favor of the short-term reward. *Planning a more realistic timeline for work reduces litigation risk.*
3. *Recalibrate through the process*—Contractors are not the only ones who experience obstacles that delay work or make it more costly. By taking a proactive approach to continually reevaluate the elements necessary for each stage, there is increased communication about progress and fewer surprises throughout the project.
4. *Communicate with customers frequently*—Expectations set the tone in many industries, but with so many external factors that can affect a construction project, keeping customers up to date on changes and problems through written notification reduces the risk of misunderstandings and dissatisfaction. Ultimately, the schedule can help demonstrate the effects of changes, delays, interruptions, etc., on the quality of work.
5. *Make your culture of process connectivity part of your brand*—Dependability is a major factor in selecting a contractor, one based on your ability to see a project through to the end as expected, without unresolved issues like litigation. Professionals would rather put their investment in the hands of someone who brings value to the project through reliability and partnership than one who adds unnecessary burdens due to short-term vision.

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