

is important to understand that a contractor who is familiar with the project type understands important issues, such as the material specifications and scheduling required to finish the job within the proposed project schedule.

A reputable contractor will also have an in-depth knowledge of the permitting and safety processes of the local jurisdiction. The more familiar a contractor is with the project type, the better equipped the contractor is to deal with issues that may arise during the construction process. Further, a contractor who is familiar with the project type is most likely able to prepare reliable estimates for the overall project's scope.

Because of their vast knowledge of local construction practices and procedures, the qualified contractor should also assist the design professional and the owner with knowledge of products and materials that are readily available for the project and be capable of suggesting supporting information to the design professional and client when selecting products, materials, and techniques. This is extremely important where there can be a cost or time savings.

COMMUNICATION AND SERVICE

It is very important for a contractor to listen to the design professional and owner and understand what they need and want. During your initial conversation with contractors, look for a level of enthusiasm and interest in the overall project. Be particularly aware of their ability to interpret design ideas and their ability to suggest ways to make them work within the project budget. A good contractor should possess the ability to alleviate concerns about the project process. The owner and the design professional should always ask the potential contractor for examples of how similar projects were implemented and solved.

Communication is essential. Make certain that the contractor maintains a viable place of business and is readily accessible in an effort to foster maximum communication. There will always be questions and concerns during the project process that will often require an expeditious response. Communication of this sort is a key to the satisfaction of a successful relationship.

A contractor who prides himself or herself on customer services is a key to overall customer satisfaction. The general contractor and his or her employees should always be courteous, competent, professional, and attentive to details. Always check references and ask questions about the contractor's performance and the level of customer services provided.

When the construction documents are finalized, the bid process is over, and the design professionals have decided on a contractor, there are still several important factors that should be addressed before construction begins. For instance, the construction process may change the conditions of inhabitation for the duration of the project. Though in most cases these changes or inconveniences will be minor, the owner should be made aware of any such potential problems that may arise prior to the start of construction.

Let's face it, quality takes time and should be remembered throughout the process. This may constitute a wait for special-order materials, or waiting for a particular specialty trade contractor (such as a specialized wall finisher) known to be reliable. We know that delaying construction may have cost implications to the client and should be avoided.

The best way to educate your client to prepare for the construction process is to allow for communication within the entire project team, which includes the contractor. The contractor must be fully informed of the detailed activities that take place during the construction process.

EXPERIENCE AND VIABILITY

Before design professionals consider a contractor for a particular project, it is important that they confirm whether or not the contractor has an established presence. A general rule of thumb suggests that if a contractor has been in business five or more years and has been involved in projects of scope similar to the project under consideration, then the construction firm most likely maintains a solid practice and is capable of establishing a solid level of workmanship and providing warranties for work performed.

In addition to a presence, a contractor must be able to meet obligations if something goes wrong on the project. The design professional may be able to gather some information by talking with other experienced trade contractors such as subs who may have worked on previous jobs with the contractor in question. The design professional will want to know about factors that will provide a level of comfort about a contractor's business experience. Look for such things as licensing and insurance coverage.

REFERENCES

Design professionals should never hesitate to request a list of references from contractors. Believe it or not, references will almost always be the most reliable source in determining a contractor's level of experience and his or her