

because the consultant sometimes acts as advisor to the client, and partner because both designer and consultant attempt to develop and manage a solution that meets the client's business objectives. The designer's work reflects on the real estate consultant's success, and vice versa.

- **Manufacturers.** *Manufacturers want designers to use their products (carpet, lighting, furniture, and the like) in the client's space. Generally, the client seeks product recommendations from the interior designer. Therefore, the manufacturer will feel compelled to make its most favorable impression on either the designer or the client. Yet manufacturers can provide a wealth of information to assist both the client and the designer.*
- **Builder/contractor.** *The builder/contractor uses the interior designer's plans as a framework for constructing the client's environment. Thus, the designer's input influences the builder/contractor's output. Conversely, the builder/contractor's execution may be seen as an indicator of the designer's effectiveness.*
- **Other consultants.** *The client or other project participants may enlist the support of other expert consultants for particular and usually highly technical areas such as mechanical, electrical, plumbing, acoustics, audio-visual systems, food service, lighting, security systems, fire protection, and structural engineering.*

If designers can collaborate effectively with everyone around the Project Circle, they can help build future business, because new assignments can come through any of these channels. Yet the designer's loyalties and focus must remain on the client and the project process. If the designer makes each decision with the client's interests in mind—not with an eye on pleasing other players—then the designer will gain a reputation for integrity. Members of the Project Circle who respect professional, responsible behavior likely will become future advocates for the designer.

Accepting Accountability for the Project Circle

Because the activities of all players in the Project Circle are so closely intertwined and contingent on one another, it can be difficult for the client to

know where to assign responsibility for breakdowns or praise for accomplishments. From the client's perspective, all the players collectively hold accountability for attaining the project's goals. A wise strategy for the interior designer (and for all players, for that matter) is to think and act as the client's representative in all relationships. This can also be described as assuming a "stewardship" or "advocacy" role for the client.

Ideally, the designer will be on the "good side" of all the potential players in each of the service categories around the Project Circle—but none more than the others. Any appearance of preference could make the designer appear biased, calling the designer's recommendations into question. Was the designer really acting with the client's best interests in mind, or was the designer entering into an arrangement of "you scratch my back, I'll scratch yours" with another service provider? The designer is a professional, working to achieve the client's total satisfaction, not gain other service providers' approval. Certainly, no one wants to burn bridges with other service providers. But even a hint that a designer acts outside the client's interest can destroy the current relationship and put everlasting tarnish on the designer's reputation.

Handling the Complexity of the Project Circle

As the Project Circle illustrates, virtually any interior design project involves a complex web of players both inside and outside the client organization. And no single player—not even the client—can be completely responsible for the project experience, because so many factors are beyond one party's immediate control. Yet because anything that happens throughout the entire experience reflects on the designer, the interior designer is in a unique position of *perceived accountability*. For example, members of the interior design team do not physically build the space, hire subcontractors, order materials, or arrange for and monitor job-site safety, nor can they control unpredictable occurrences such as labor strikes or "acts of God." Yet the client's facility manager may look to the interior designer to provide guidance and delivery on the promise of a safe journey in the creation, construction and occupancy of a new space or facility.

The interior designer's challenge, then, is *to act responsibly without having total responsibility*. In the following ways, the designer must work to make