It is often said that a job which starts out as a problem job usually continues to be a problem job throughout its course. Many wall and ceiling contractors bear the brunt of problem jobs because they typically are at the end of the major trades and are usually blamed for all of the schedule and construction ails caused by the general contractor and previous trades. The best way to prevent all of the job problems from landing on the wall and ceiling contractor’s lap is to recognize when efforts are being made to dump problems onto your lap.

The first telltale sign of attempts to dump a problem onto your lap is the existence of a young and inexperienced on-site project manager. Although everyone must learn his or her own profession, the increasing tendency of general contractors is to place the least expensive management person on site while moving the more experienced management people up the corporate ladder. This results in the least expensive and least experienced person working where the most experienced person ought to be. The inexperience of young project managers is usually demonstrated by letters, correspondence and general communications.

A second sign to watch out for is the letter stating in a variety of different ways that “You are behind schedule.” This type of communication is sometimes accompanied by remarks such as, “We told you at job meetings that you were behind schedule, and you said nothing.” This type of correspondence and communication is typically meaningless on a problem project since the pace of most problem projects bears no resemblance to any printed or published schedule. It may very well be that you as a wall and ceiling contractor are behind the published schedule although well ahead of the actual pace of the project. Simply being behind a printed schedule is certainly not indicative of your performance.

A third typical example of written correspondence which you should spot immediately is when a general contractor or an inexperienced project manager writes, after an inquiry from your firm regarding any aspect of the work, that you are to do your work “in accordance with plans and specifications.” You know that you are required to do your work in accordance with plans and specifications and an inexperienced project manager telling you this does not assist in furthering the project. What this type of letter may demonstrate is that either the project manager does not know for himself or herself what the plans and specifications call for, or the project manager is not getting design answers from the owner or architect—or the project manager knows in his or her heart that you are right but cannot acknowledge it in writing.

When you see any one of these three conditions, you should address them in correspondence, politely at first, so that your position is preserved for later reference. Early detection and recognition of these problems, and incorporating your recognitions of these problems into your own written communication is a must and will reduce the likelihood of exposure on a problem job if it ever turns into a claim.

Early detection of problems can help you prevent them.

About the Author
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