



An architect's insider tips about the construction process

Key insights for administrators on choosing the best builder for your church.

If exit interviews were conducted with churches at the conclusion of their construction projects, the most consistent comment heard would be the correlation between the general contractor selected and the success (or frustration) of the project.

The selection of the best builder for your project is the critical link to a successful construction story. You've undoubtedly heard the "horror-film" stories of your brethren's new construction project and hopefully the "romantic-comedy" stories as well. But despite all the hype, the most consistently significant issue that your church faces is picking the right builder.

Even as an architect, I still say the builder is most important during the construction time period. The architect is more critical to the master planning, aesthetics and function of the facility. A builder can make a bad architect look great and they can make a great architect look bad during construction.

Assuming that you have narrowed your selection list of builders to three or four, how should you decide? Do you pick the one with the friendliest owner? Should you be looking toward the most professional PowerPoint presentation or the builder that you know the best? Here are a few essential factors in picking the contractor that will help your construction story have a happy ending.

The prerequisite

Unfortunately, most churches skip over the quintessential factor in selecting the right builder — self evaluation. You cannot

pick the right builder if you do not understand what services you need provided or what type of client you will be.

Ruthlessly self-evaluate your level of commercial construction experience, your communication chain of command, your need for assistance and leadership and your desired level of professionalism. Do you have a culture of trust or do you need a builder with a history of systematic legal documentation? Don't overlook your location in the country or your greater neighborhood. Your need for a builder in rural Pennsylvania county would be drastically different from a working-class neighborhood in Oklahoma or an urban site in Los Angeles.

INSIDER TIP: Don't start the interviews until you can agree on what you need in a builder. Predetermine your point-of-contact person for the construction.

Essential elements

If you eliminate the nonessential elements in your selection criteria, the result would be:

Experience: There is no better tool for a builder to gain relevant expertise than to have recently completed projects of similar scope and complexity.

INSIDER TIP: Rely on this factor foremost, but don't be like Goliath and overlook the Holy Spirit's energetic "David" selection.

References: Most references will attempt to be kind and coy but their information is invaluable. Do not skip this step. >>

By Steven W. Barduson

Ask how references would handle the builder differently and if they would hire the builder again. Ask how the builder handled conflict, understanding that there are two sides to each story.

INSIDER TIP: Call a client who is not on their reference list but who had recently completed a project with the builder.

Price: Most quality general contractors fall into three cost categories:

1. **Low cost** — These smaller overhead builders can provide the best value, but typically you will have less control over the process and the quality of materials chosen.

2. **High cost** — These builders typically offer top quality project management systems and subcontractors.

3. **The majority** — These diverse builders typically distinguish themselves by project type, approach, sustainability, personnel or other characteristics and offer similar costing.

INSIDER TIP: Focus on the total building cost per square foot instead of the percent construction fee. Ask each builder for the typical range of construction cost for recent churches, including their monthly cost for "general conditions" with supervision.

Chemistry: The key stakeholders for the church need to enjoy being with the builders and must also trust their integrity. Without mutual respect, the project will quickly implode.

INSIDER TIP: Ask to meet the proposed superintendent and project manager(s) with whom you'll interact with the most.

Heart for churches: Don't expect only Christian companies to be hired for church work. This is because we have yet to find a

builder where every person from the executives and administration personnel to every estimator, project manager and superintendent are committed believers. However, since working with churches is unique, the builder needs to have a heart for the faith. They can expect weekend/night meetings, committee involvement, indecision and often more criticism than a typical project type.

INSIDER TIP: In the industry, churches are known for expecting the most services for the least fee while complaining but performing work with the most eternal significance.

It would be irresponsible if the roles of the Holy Spirit and prayer in your selection process were not emphasized. Do your homework with diligence but also pray. These criteria are meant to assist you on the path toward finding the best builder for your construction project, but God is the leader. CE



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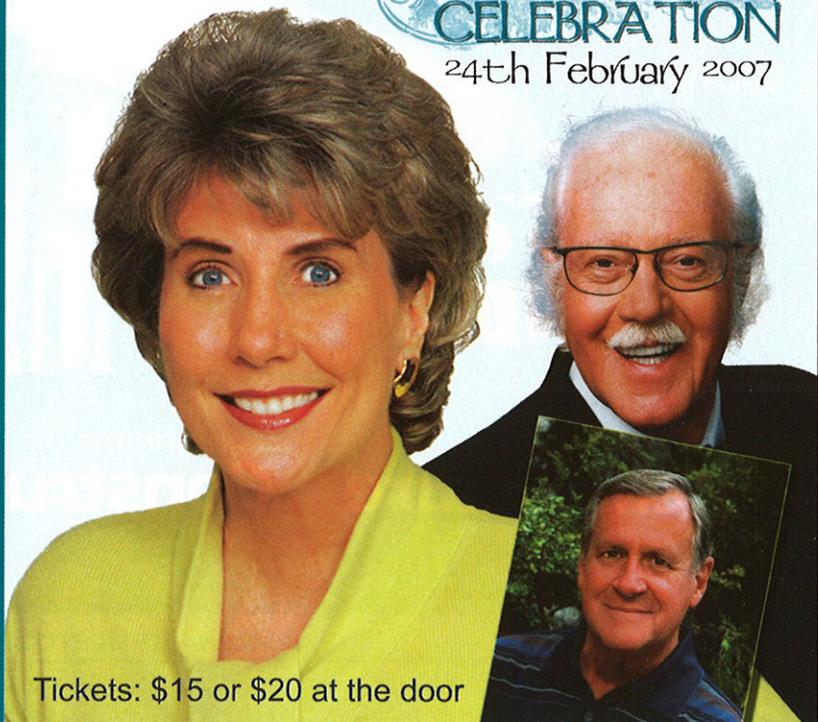
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