



Don't Leave Your Best Players on the Bench: Involve Your Subcontractors Early and Often

March is in full swing, and basketball fever has reached its yearly high. The competition remains fierce as teams seek a coveted championship. But as fans well know, championships are not won by just one person. When it comes to winning, successful basketball teams are much like successful construction project teams.

Great basketball programs are indisputably built by the best coaches. After all, what would UCLA be without John Wooden? What would Duke be without Coach K, Mike Krzyzewski? And let's not forget about my treasured Gonzaga Bulldogs. That said, a coach cannot single-handedly will their team to a championship. Coaches and key players must step up and perform as a team.

The same is true in construction. Though many teams are involved in the construction process, one of the most important teams is between the general contractor and its subcontractors. General contractors can only successfully complete projects with highly skilled specialty subcontractors stepping up to do their part. However, general contractors often leave their subcontractors— some of their best players — on the sidelines until it is too late in the game to make a difference. Getting subcontractors off the bench and into the game sooner can put major points on the board for project delivery and risk mitigation.

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Much like each basketball team is different from season to season, the relationships between general contractors and subcontractors change over time. While each team will have its own nuances (that are beyond the scope of this article), here are some practical, high-level tips to get subcontractors involved:

1. Open the playbook.

Too often, general contractors make their “playbook,” the schedule, without involving subcontractors. That means challenges such as illogical sequencing or unrealistic durations only surface when it comes time for subcontractors to perform the work. General contractors who take their subcontractors off the bench and involve them in schedule coordination early will find that their perspectives can inform more efficient sequencing and realistic timelines from the start, even in fast-track scenarios. Plus, subcontractors are more willing to push to meet deadlines they have had a hand in setting.

Involving subcontractors in the scheduling process is like the “practice” for the project team. When the time comes for work to start, the team will know their roles and how they fit into the bigger picture.

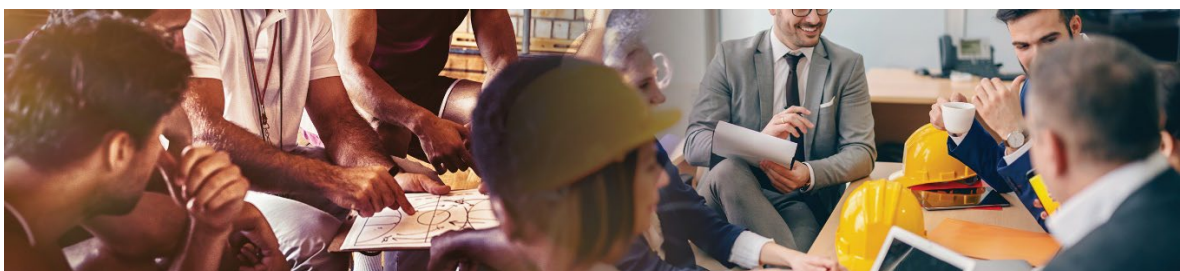


2. Communicate, communicate, and communicate again.

Think back to any of the best matchups you have watched in recent memory. If you removed the screaming fans and pep bands, would you be left with the sweet sound of silence? Hardly. Coaches are constantly communicating with their players. Players are continually communicating with each other. The result is the ability to quickly act and react to an endless number of scenarios as the game unfolds.

Just as coaches actively and consistently communicate with their teams, general contractors should follow suit in communicating with their subcontractors. This does not mean once a month or even once a week at a schedule meeting. Through proactive, daily communication, general contractors will know the issues facing their key players and can quickly react to keep the whole team on the offensive.

General contractors should also create avenues for subcontractors to coordinate with each other. Strong relationships and continuous communication between subcontractors can help alleviate coordination and sequencing issues that often plague projects. Facilitating communication empowers subcontractors to reach reasonable solutions and take action to keep the ball moving.



3. Proactively manage injuries.

Even with an open playbook and an emphasis on communication, there is still the potential for a project to experience setbacks and unforeseen delays. Think of these issues as the “injuries” that could derail the entire season. When discovered early, the correct mitigation measures can be implemented to allow the injury to heal and keep players in the game. For example, subcontractors struggling to meet deadlines can be an early indicator of larger project impacts. When left “untreated,” these may compound into significant and costly delays.

When a general contractor is active in its subcontractors’ work, these potential injuries are easier to spot. Then, the correct mitigation measures can be implemented to heal any issues. For example, the general contractor can involve a subcontractor in its compensation and/or time extension requests back to the owner or implement other solutions.



4. Celebrate the victory.

Project teams are better poised for success when subcontractors have had input in the schedule when the team engages in active communication, and when issues are mitigated early. When that happens, and projects are delivered successfully, celebrations are in order!



All of this underscores the importance of taking subcontractors off the bench and getting them involved in projects early and often. When they are set up to perform their best, everyone reaps the rewards of the team’s success.

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