

QoD – Building Officials, do you love ‘em or hate ‘em?

Last month we had a question regarding the relationship between specifiers, architects and engineers, and the component manufacturer. We spoke specifically about the benefits of collaboration where each party was enabled to use their creativity and intellectual property to best compliment the other party for the benefit of the entire project. This months question taps that same vein, only with regards to your relationship with your local Building Officials.

I travel frequently and am in component manufacturing plants often. I regularly hear complaints that the local building inspector is requiring this, that or the next thing and is generally being a pain in their collective back-sides. When these situations occur, I will always take the opportunity to ask the technicians, design manager and/or owner the question above. Building Officials, do you love them or hate them? Interestingly for many, they see them as another foe. This attitude continues to surprise me, even after all these years.

Like the relationship with the specifying community, trying to sneak something past your Building Department will only cause the rift to deepen. They will be watching your submittals like a hawk stalking prey...which, by the way, is what you really want them to be doing both in their office and out on the job site! Perhaps a better approach is to try and work with them on understanding their issues and concerns, and then offering to provide them with some industry training to get everyone on the same page. This may ultimately become training for the truss technicians as well. Is it possible that you may not have been dealing with one of their concerns correctly in the beginning? Once you get together and start communicating, I'm sure that you'll each find positions of strength (and weaknesses) from which the basis for a lunch and learn seminar can be created to everyone's benefit. This can and should lead to the improved relations which benefit both parties. Do you think it would not be worth the cost of a couple pizzas and some soda to have the lunch hour to review the contents of your submittal package face-to-face with the Building Department? I sure do! Better yet, if you can get them to commit, ask them all to come out to your plant. While there you can also offer a tour of your facility to show them what you do. Many, if not most of them have probably never stepped foot into a truss plant. They will be fascinated by the technology that you take for granted, that they are seeing for the first time. Your industry trade association, SBCA, has a multitude of prepared educational programs to assist you with the content for your presentations, and no one knows your plant and its functions better than you and your staff. They are on your turf, puff up your chest and show them how proud you are of what you do and how you do it.

While on the topic of relationship building, be prepared to listen to their questions and truly hear their concerns. Is the problem that they don't understand how to read a Truss Design Drawing, or can't find the information they're looking for because everyone's drawings are different. You know you can help. Is it because they can't keep up with the codes that they are enforcing because they change too often? Is it that they haven't had time to read the latest referenced standard and incorporate it into their latest thinking? You can help there too. Many, many times, simply sitting at the same table and having open dialogue with deepen both of your understandings. Possibly more important, it puts a human face on each side of the question and breaks down the barriers of communication.

Understand that they know their business probably better than you do and that you know your business probably better than them (most assuredly, I'm just trying to be fair). Reach out, take the first step. Maybe you simply give the head building official a call and ask if there is anything that you or your company (or maybe the local SBCA Chapter) can do to assist them. Are they having an education

conference? Do they ever do lunch-and-learn sessions? Show them you are willing to open dialogue. It may not lead to an instant success, but you will have planted a seed and started the conversation. This makes the second conversation even easier. Give them a bit and then call them back. Invite them to your plant for coffee, donuts and a tour. Make it easy on them to take the baby steps towards a meaningful relationship. Ultimately you will be glad you did, and so will they. You want proof? Ask your wife or husband. Thanks for reading.