

BACK TO BASICS: THE IMPORTANCE OF FACE-TO-FACE COMMUNICATION

by David Whitemyer, AIA

PSMJ has long been extolling the virtues of project managers who get up from their desks and engage directly with team members—and their clients!—rather than sitting in front of their computers and leading via email. Armchair project managers aren't very effective.

Although it should go without saying, face-to-face communication is essential for successful project management. But the prevalence of email and texting has made this point worth repeating. This is especially true for the Millennial-aged managers in your firm, who probably feel more comfortable communicating digitally, whether it be via text, or even through Skype and Google Hangout.

Yes, meetings can often feel like time-wasters. And yes, emailing and phone calls are just so easy. But for effective leadership, and for fostering a strong project team culture, nothing beats face-to-face communication. If you're not a natural at this, or if you're out of practice, here are four basic rules for face-to-face communication.

1. Make the Effort

Composing an email takes very little effort. Standing up and walking over to someone's desk, to check in with him, takes a bit more energy. And picking up the phone and asking a client if she'd like to get together for lunch takes confidence and time. All of which will make you stand out.

This does more than just improving your leadership skills and connections with clients. If you're consistently the assertive individual in your firm who is seen working with your team one-on-one, and meeting with clients simply to strengthen the relationship, you'll get a reputation as a go-getter and relationship-builder, which is a good thing in any A/E firm.

2. Be in the Moment

This cannot be stated loudly enough: Keep your phone off (or silent) and in your pocket. Even using your phone to jot down a note or check your calendar can come across as being rude. Whether you're speaking with someone on your project team or with a client, maintain good eye contact, and remember that facial and body language often speak louder than words.

3. Be Clear and Concise

Don't waste people's time, especially those in your firm who are working on billable hours. When working face-to-face with team members, try to keep the small talk to a minimum and respect that people's time is valuable. When talking with clients about business, stay on target.

4. Follow Up

This goes for one-on-one working sessions with your project team members and for meetings and lunches (formal or informal) with your clients. Where technologies like texting, emailing, and phone calling is helpful, is for following up on your face-to-face communication. If you told a client that you'd follow up by sending her some project materials, send it in an email. If you and a project team member came to a decision about something, or set up some action items, follow this up in writing. ●



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The First LEED-Platinum Certified Factory

Just a bit south of downtown Chicago, in the Pullman Park district, architecture firm William McDonough + Partners just completed the first LEED-platinum certified factory. The approximately 150,000 square foot facility is owned by Method Products, maker of environmentally friendly cleaning products.

The building has a 1520 square foot succulent green roof, a wind turbine, and solar energy trees. It also features light-reflecting concrete, numerous skylights, and a 120 gallon solar-powered water heating system. All of this, and the company has a zero-landfill goal, with just about everything coming into the factory expected to be used, recycled, or composted. ●

Blueprint for Success (Continued from page 5)

Defining and refining your firm's operational blueprint will lead to better quality in operations, staff, and product. You'll see greater profitability as you identify and eliminate the elements of your operations that are not functioning as they should, and you'll develop a better sense of who is doing what and how well they're doing it. Best of all, an operational blueprint creates an internal mechanism that will allow you to focus on the work you want to do, rather than bog you down with minutia.

Use your blueprint to communicate your expectations, define roles, and create greater clarity in your firm. It will empower you to relax in the knowledge that the work is being performed to your standards, and allow you to finally focus on the aspects of your firm that you truly enjoy. ●



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