

WHY JOHNNY DOESN'T READ..... SPECS

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Why doesn't Johnny (read: too many architects, engineers, contractors, sub-contractors, suppliers and manufacturers) read the specifications?

Good question--oddly enough easily answered.

Those "Johnnies" either don't know they should read the specs, or they know they should and simply ignore that fact! That breaks down to about 10% for the former and 90% for the latter!

They don't know????? Well, sure, from our (spec writers) side of things, it is hard to realize this simple fact. Specifications carry such a low priority and are so grossly misunderstood, maligned, shuttled off and ignored in academic circles as well as in professional circles, they have all but disappeared--yet they exist on most every project. Why is that? How can that be? Simply, it is the height of hypocrisy that they are being done because of the factual need for them, and in spite of the distinct lack of respect for them and the lack of understanding of what they do, the protection they provided, and the value of the information they contain--and then being all but totally ignored!

Talk about stupid situations--this is a classic, virtually like no other!

Look! Just as the Agreement in Contract Documents is a highly veiled and lesser considered document, so too specifications. There is such a high priority and emphasis on graphic representation that the written documents are deemed nuisance simply because since Johnny isn't the most interested or best reader, Johnny need not concern himself with them. That simple! Almost ludicrous, nonsensical and pathetic! Obviously such word-mongers as attorneys, feast on words, and the twists and turns that can be imposed on and through them. Hence, the immediate use of specifications in the court room!

Two or three things really and truly, if not drastically need to happen--and there appears to be no current appetite for any of them.

First, there is an absolute necessity to stridently get fundamental understanding of specifications (and NO, not all the intricacies, nuances, quirks and inner workings of them) in the professional schools. There is no option here for planting the seeds of basic understanding their use, relationships and value (and not necessarily including the writing of them).

Second, we absolutely need to teach the concept and reality of three Cs just as we (in some places at least) teach the three Rs. Students deserve (!!!!!) and need to know these documents on sight and to understand their unique individual contributions and impact of all projects and contributing parties. Each contract document needs to be properly founded and given its true lasting and ever-present relationship to the others and to each project's work.

Third, there is need to bring this same understanding to all those allied with, or associated with construction projects. The success of projects involves a straight line progression with no distractions via disputes, claims and other "non-essential" exercises. It needs the cooperation and full understanding of each team member to pull together, cooperate and truly understand their direct contribution and its impact on others. Specifications go a long way to setting the format for all this, IF all participants read, know about, understand, and comply as required. This is not to set subservience in place, but merely to hone relationships to the point that the project moves closer and close to that proverbial "well-oiled machine".

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Now if you agree with and buy into all this (and hopefully you do) then what entity is best positioned to address these needs? Who can best bring the needed understanding to all these parties--academic, professional and project? Where does the deepest pool of specifications knowledge and expertise lie?

Let's **C**ommunicate
Specifications
Information !

(For more on this same general topic, see author's article on page 26 of the May, 2008 CONSTRUCTION SPECIFIER)