

EQUALITY OF DOCUMENTS

by Ralph Liebing, RA, CSI

Cincinnati, OH

Damn it! Specifications are important! So important, in fact, that they are full and inseparable partners with the drawings! Now let's get this straight, once and for all, and work to establish this basic premise in the minds of all those concerned with construction--design professionals, consultants, owners, clients, tenants, suppliers, representatives, manufactures, constrictors, sub-contractors, trade workers, and.....students in all construction related curricula.

To do this *we need to get beyond* our all too pompous and overly professional eliteness and get real! Human! Open! And by golly, "attractive" as to task, status, contribution, value and importance. We need to put aside our pity party that is continually in session, grousing about the lack of new specifiers (when we do nothing to attract and train them), and the low respect and esteem we receive from others (when we do little or nothing to reach out to or approach them for mutual concerns and understanding).

We've been on our collective duff for far too long. Are we so stupid that we do not perceive that our own inaction contributes to the malaise we are almost literally "forced" to work in? We love to stand apart (in our own minds) as near-know-it-alls, so firm and resolute in ourselves and our intelligence, knowledge and experience. Few surpass us--well, they really do, but in other areas, and by pooh-poohing us and challenging our existence and value.

It would be appropriate to sincerely go back to good ol' Square One and start with what specifications are, their use, their value to various contractual parties and their contribution to projects, overall. The issue is not really about us--it's about our product and why they even exists. They are maligned by those who are merely touched by them as well as those fully impacted by them. Strange!

One group simply does not understand them. the other does understand in a misguided manner and simply finds it more convenient to ignore or obviate them and then gripe, free-lance or work at odds with requirements (and justifying such actions by impugning the specs)--than to try to better understand and delve into their correct use. Stranger yet!

But there we are, in the middle, cranking away, satisfying ourselves when even some of our bosses and colleagues see us only down the slope of their noses. We refine; we hone; we struggle to get it right (and for the sake of others); we sweat and strain to be complete, correct, and clear only to find our products as CCC door stops in all too many instances. We really reside in our own version of the firehouse--a crew ready for emergency calls--i.e., when the litigation gets going strong and heavy. Oh, there are the minor incidents of misunderstanding, miniscule ambiguity, and flat out misreading, but in the main we're in the "firehouse" cranking out more.

We certainly do not carry the ambiance of the fire fighter, but work in the shadows producing documents many discard in one way of another--and yet, our produced documents are always named and considered to be one of the Contract Documents--the triad that controls construction projects. Is there indeed truth in the disparity between the three CD "partners"? One relies on and references the other two which seems to give due credence--perhaps even equality--to both. Neither of those others can be used alone to produce projects--a one-legged situation with no crutch, cane or other support? Not hardly! NO one is saying we need to "sell" ourselves to others but we sure could use some interfacing, approaching, explaining, education and training in other venues to simply upgrade and acquaint the others in the fundamental goodness, value and proper utilization of what we do. We may be able to duly up-value specs by also working in the drawings arena to produce mutuality, consistency and coherence!

Oh, here's a good one--who in the devil started or invented specifications and spec writing?

Might check Genesis 6: 14-16! Might note, too, that there is no record of the "drawings" Noah had to work to! Well, OK, but then things really have changed since then--and maybe they are and can be better.