

WHO

DO WE;

SHOULD WE;

COULD WE;

MUST WE; TALK TO-WITH?

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Joan Rivers says, "Can we talk?"

Reasonable folks in many situations would say, "Let's talk".

But we submit our call is "Why don't we talk?"

As starters, let's just review and list some of our "problems/situations" with specification writing. No, not the individual skills, but the overall impression and view, industry-wide, of our documents.

- * Too often specifications are not given proper respect, often openly perceived as "necessary evils"; this is due in large part to the lack of fundamental knowledge about specifications leads to rumors, mis-information, and negative views and comments
- * Too often specifications are given short shrift due to lack of understanding of their function, legal standing and importance to all project parties
- * Too often specifications are ignored, shunned or circumvented as intrusions or useless documents
- * Too often specifications are not readily considered as part of the Contract Documents for the project
- * Too often specifications are viewed as elitist documents; inappropriate and intrusively demanding of unreasonable expectations (whew!!)
- * Too often settlement of disputes, mediations, arbitrations and law suits hinge on the contents of the specifications
- * Too often specifications written by the architect are not understood, supported, reinforced, or accommodated by the other disciplines (they see them as documents solely of the architect).
- * Too often specifications are written in fragmented sessions, where some disciplines merely try to respond to others, as best they can, and without truly understanding how the various specifications need to interface and fully support each other—in format, content, intent, legally, etc.
- * Too often specifications are almost literally discarded, followed by free-lancing, poor or improper work, and much grousing
- * Too often specifications are not seen as integral documents full of valuable information necessary for correct execution of the project
- * Too often specifications are perceived to be convoluted, punitive, revengeful, complex, indistinct, unresponsive, and highly unreasonable
- * Too often specifications are seen as vague documents that require too much, require changes in procedures and methods of construction and force work to be done in new and unfamiliar ways

- * Too often specifications are seen and considered to be documents written by those unfamiliar with construction materials, methods and procedures.
- * Too often specifications are seen as factors in added project cost; in large measure this is not true given project circumstances.
- * Too often specifications are produced in a unilateral context, without "conversation" or discussion with others in the specific design and construction modes of a project.
- * Too often there is no reaching out to others, in regard to specifications content, writing, etc.; rather there is primarily a closed circle of information and content within only the writing profession (the preaching to the choir syndrome).
- * Too often there is no wide-ranging, clearing house type discussion of what should be in the specifications, and what should not, among all participants in project (like is done by the AIA in developing their standardized forms).
- * Too often specifications are perceived as a document lacking any "mutuality", but rather as a one-sided set of requirements; too often the value of specifications to the other parties is not evident, not discussed, or not made evident in any manner, thus creating a "separate" document perception.
- * Too often specifications are a "closed book"--literally, figuratively, and as a viable collective instrument, highly contributive on each job site.

AND FAR TOO OFTEN, in the rush of the business day, we fail to anticipate, guard against, educate about, acknowledge, deal with, counteract or even question any or all of this--and certainly have not asked any of the questions in the title--out loud, often enough, recently, or with sincere inquisitiveness. We're too busy, are we, to make things better?

We need to stop talking so much to each other, specification writers!

The obvious question, then, is not "Can we talk"?, but rather "We NEED to talk, now and often, don't we?--to many others and about many things"!