

Good morning, everybody. Dennis Engelbrecht with The Family Business Institute, Digging Deeper.

Over the last many years, I don't know why it took me so long, but I've come to the revelation that collaboration is the number one skill in construction, the number one skill for the future, the most important thing that your folks need to be able to do. So why is that? Well, there are a number of reasons that I think collaboration is so important. The first is, there are some industry trends that have been, in a sense, working against us. So, one of them is the baby boomers, the largest generation, is at the point of retirement. And we've had so many of these highly skilled, knowledgeable folks retiring from our industry, and that has left a dearth of knowledge, skill, experience, all of those things. And today, we have probably a lot fewer field-raised leaders, and we have more college-raised leaders who might have missed some element of development back in the day.

So, by saying that, we have more folks that really lack the hands-on experience, and therefore don't have the knowledge it takes to do things themselves, and that makes collaboration more important. The second reason collaborations become more important is the change in the industry toward more collaborative building methods. All right? The fact that they're collaborative, right? Design build, construction management at risk. These are the so-called collaborative building methods. Well, most of construction now is being built collaboratively in terms of the whole method of doing it, so the people executing it need to have the skill of collaboration. They need to be good at being part of others' collaboration and being able to gather people to collaborate themselves. So, I really see collaboration as the defining skill for future construction leaders.

So, when do you need to collaborate? So very simply, you need to collaborate any time your information or knowledge is incomplete or imperfect. All right? If you try to move forward with decisions with imperfect or incomplete knowledge, you're going to get bad decisions. So, what do you do if you don't possess that knowledge? You collaborate, you draw on others, you bring in the experts, or you bring in several people who can at least talk it out and come to a better decision. You also need collaboration when team buy-in's going to be critical to the success of whatever you're working on, the project itself, of course, but maybe some aspect of the project. If you're going to need team buy-in, collaboration sets the stage for that buy-in.

If you're just dictating means and methods or dictating how you're going to get something done, your hope is that everybody says, "Oh, yeah. Right. Yeah. That's the way to go. We're all marching in line. You bet you. We're happy. Thanks for giving us all of that direction." Well, unfortunately, people don't work that way in a lot of cases, right? They want to know that they've been heard if they got a different opinion. They want to do it their way or try it that way. So, collaboration is key to getting those ideas out, and in the end, making people feel like it's a group decision, or at least that they've been heard enough and now they understand the reasoning behind why you're doing things a certain way. So, you need collaboration when you need team buy-in.

And then, finally you need collaboration where there are diverging interests. What do I mean by diverging interests? Well, the owner wants more building for their money. You as the contractor has a certain scope that you've priced, and you don't exactly want to pay for that extra building that they want, right? So, you have diverging interests. And the same may happen between the trade contractor and the general contractor. You may have diverging interests against who's responsibility is who's in doing something. So, when you have diverging interests, you need collaboration to get people, again, on the same page so that you can come to a decision or conclusion that both sides feel is reasonable, and it becomes win-win.

And you've heard us talk before, if it's not a win-win solution, it usually turns into a lose-lose solution because the loser will usually try to find a way to take it out on the winner. So, you want to collaborate where your information knowledge isn't perfect, where you need buy-in, and where there are diverging interests. Now the question is, how do you collaborate

successfully? Well, again, I mentioned if this is the skill for the future, well, we hope there's a how to get folks there so they're good at collaboration. So, a lot of collaboration is about building and achieving excellence, I'm sorry, building and achieving consensus, so the same skills and attributes that would make you a good consensus builder are good for collaboration.

So, among those are some trainable aspects, such as listening. You can always learn to be a better listener, right? And we have to hear what's being said, and we also have to see the body language and things like that, so we get the feel of what is being said, and maybe what is being unsaid. All right? Part of being a great listener is to understand what's said and what's unsaid when people aren't comfortable. Asking great questions. Well, if you want to collaborate, you want to build consensus, you got to ask great questions. Those questions draw out the information that isn't maybe told initially, but it also may draw out the feelings behind the information that you need to address to be able to come to consensus.

Conflict resolution is key. Key to conflict resolution, of course, is empathizing, empathizing, getting off your side and getting over and seeing it from the other person's side. All right? And getting off your side, that's a key skill. If you're too stuck on your own opinion or your own side, you'll never be good at conflict resolution. The only way you do that is by getting off of your side, and truly they walk a mile in the other person's shoes. So those are all sort of training elements of consensus. Probably one of the key obstacles to good consensus building, I just sort of alluded to a little bit, but you have to get over the need to be right, and you have to get over the need to be the smartest person in the room. All right?

And I can certainly look at myself and look back in time, and boy, do I wish I learned that a long time ago, because there was a lot of pain that went along with trying to be and prove that I was the smartest person in the room many, many, many times. And what I've come to learn is, the smartest person in the room is actually the one who's not talking. They're doing the listening and they're bringing together the other ideas of everybody else, and that the room itself is smarter than the individual. So, getting over the need to be right, getting over the need to be the smartest person in the room. If you've got some folks, and as I'm talking about that, you're seeing somebody's picture there, they may need a good stern talking to, or be able to come to that understanding to be able to get over that.

Because great collaboration requires the willingness and need to bring folks together to listen, to be open to hearing the good and better ideas from the others, and to not have that need for your knowledge or idea to carry the day. So, collaboration. Hire for it, train for it, and by the way, model it yourself. If you want to have great collaboration in your company, you yourself need to be that model of collaboration in your own interactions, in your own meetings. But collaboration's where it's at for the future, and I hope you have a lot more of it.

Dennis Engelbrecht, Digging Deeper.