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Top 10 Don'ts for Every TI project

It is exciting to see the metro area percolating with new commercial projects this year. It's like early springtime in commercial real estate. Although I wish I could manage every commercial construction project in this town, the truth is I can't. What I can do is help by sharing some golden rules that I have developed over the last 10 years of project consulting. These rules can be applied to every project.

■ **Don't pretend you understand the design drawings.** Drawings can be very difficult to comprehend if you are not in the business. Ask questions, renderings are worth a thousand words, and 3-d modeling is the ultimate visualization tool for projects. Read every note.

■ **Don't blow the budget.** Normally this is easier said than done, but in this market it's hard to blow the budget. Pricing is very competitive and landlords are still very flexible with utilization of tenant improvement dollars. Make sure your project manager has construction estimating and purchasing experience. If you can spend less on construction, you can spend more on office furnishings, equipment and other business development opportunities to help catapult your employees to top performance.

■ **Don't skip a legal review.** A good attorney can quickly evaluate contracts and put protective measures in place with minimal impact to your budget. In my 26 years

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of being in the business, I never have been in court for a project, or sued for any work. I have heard stories of projects happening without contracts or proper language in place that could have prevented lots of senseless time and money wasted. Get your contract negotiated and executed when you start. Engage a solid attorney for project peace of mind. It's cheap and worthy insurance.

■ **Don't assume all furniture manufacturers and dealers are equal.** They are not. Subtle design differences need to be understood for correct decision making. Service and change order philosophies vary between dealers. Quality of materials and storage of attic stock can affect your future bottom line. Work surfaces and storage options can make or break effective work production.

■ **Don't forget about IT.** IT guys and gals run the corporate world. Better find out cooling and power requirements for IT equipment before the drawings are done. You may need additional conduits and floor penetrations also. Changes like this during construction could cost more money and delay the project if not caught in time. Have IT engaged early in the project so, you save time and money later.

■ **Don't ignore or try to avoid municipal requirements.** Metrowide we are extremely lucky to have a second set of eyes reviewing drawings before we start demolition or construction. Overseeing life safety for building occupants and design for commercial construction is no easy task. Be grateful when you receive comments to your plans or correction notices from site inspections – they may be saving your coworker or employee's life.

■ **Don't forget to hire a project manager.** No, you are not qualified because you built out your own basement. Only project managers with deep construction experience are worth their fee and then some. Project managers know when and how to negotiate work letters, proposals, contracts and terms. Market experience in this field saves millions of dollars in project costs every year. These efforts are contributing directly to economic growth and employee retention.

■ **Don't forget about the move.** Encourage your employees to purge early and don't forget to reserve the elevators, which are critical for the move. I once moved five floors in a weekend downtown. We disassembled more than 350 desks on a Friday and had them all back up and ready on Monday. A well-developed relocation plan is critical for employees.

■ **Don't just pick the bigger firm.** Although sometimes there can be

advantages using a bigger firm, the last few years we have seen numerous mergers and consolidations, which includes culture clashing and turnover. Interview the individuals working on your project and make provisions in the contract that they are not reassigned to another project until you are satisfied with yours.

■ **Don't forget to be a good corporate citizen.** Investigate the possibility of being a LEED certified project. At a minimum, three issues should be evaluated on every project: installing occupancy sensors and maximizing lighting efficiencies through design; reducing your HVAC costs through alternative designs; and controlling waste management during demolition and construction. If we implement the first two cost-effective items on every project, I think we could save close to 20 percent utility consumption through a large part of our market. Diverting reusable materials from the land fill is good business.

If you enjoyed my top 10 don'ts on projects, then you will love my top 10 do's. If you are planning a project, you'd better get going sooner rather than later. Although my crystal ball is a little foggy at the moment, I believe the metro area is ready to launch. The less money you spend on projects, the more you can spend on employees and growing your revenue. Pull the trigger now before the gold rush happens in commercial real estate again.