

Fire! Run to It, Not From It!

Executive summary. Construction often times does not go per plan. These unexpected variances in the plan can make or break a job. How you treat these “fires” can define your effectiveness as a manager.

What could go wrong? In construction there’s dozens, if not hundreds or thousands of things, that can go wrong:

Labor	Weather	Safety	Cash Flow
Material Supply	Equipment Breakdown	Subcontractor Performance	Labor
The Public	Labor	Ground Conditions	Client

These all popped into my head in about 30 seconds as I typed them in. And no, there’s no mistake – I did enter *Labor* three times. Most of your problems in construction, or any industry, involve employees.

If you see a fire run to it, not from it!

Smoke can turn into fire which can turn into raging infernos in regards to project problems. Some may term very hairy issues “dumpster fires” [QR].

Management of these issues is almost always best served by immediate attention.

What sort of fires and how to I extinguish them? Changed conditions or change orders are large, numerous, and usually contentious issues. The scenario goes that a contractor brings to the attention of the owner, a changed condition, and may even recommend the solution. This innocuous RFI, if untimely addressed or ignored, can rage. Extinguishing this fire is as simple as meeting with the Contractor and Engineer of Record and developing a solution.

A second scenario involves Suzy who leaves standing water around the bathroom sink and Jennifer has to always wipe it down when she uses the restroom after her. These employee



challenges are best handled by your human resources person – if you have a trained person in this area, use them.

Lastly, a subcontractor who you're not paying is constantly calling for payment. The reason could be one of many which may even be his fault, but ignoring the phone calls and emails is not the way to handle the issue. The main reason, and most selfish reason, for addressing this issue is the effect on your job (versus the cash flow status of your subcontractor). If your job is going to fall behind schedule, or the trickle effects of non-performance of this particular subcontractor will impact your project in a more global manner, call a meeting. Or at a minimum, answer your phone and have a conversation.



My Story. Each of these examples above are my personal anecdotes. The anecdote with Suzy and Jennifer ended up with Suzy walking to the police station and filing a harassment charge against Jennifer. You can't even make this stuff up.

But in every case, you should be a fireman. If there's a fire, big or small, a good manager will run to it, not away! Managing a small flame or smoldering today is easier than a nine-alarm fire next week. Address issues quickly, even if you do not have an answer. Otherwise prepare for the dumpster fire described by Jake Tapper in the QR Code above!

Work safe!