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On your quest for perfection try mixing "total quality" into your next interior painting job

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Advances in digital technology have had an enormous impact on the way we live and do business. But few of us consider the underlying processes that result in the incredible functionality and reliability of digital devices. The way digital products are designed, manufactured and maintained relies on an industrial philosophy first developed in Japan in the 1950s.

Phrases like "total quality" and "continuous improvement" arising from those practices have become watchwords in industry all over the world. Interestingly enough, such ideas can also be applied to such apparently unrelated areas as building maintenance and refurbishment.

The quest for perfection

In a way, this approach is similar to the quest for perfection that defines our own ideals of "the very best" in building trades craftsmanship. As facilities managers work to ensure properties become greener, can be operated more cost-efficiently and incorporate new features and amenities, continuous improvement can serve as a worthy objective.

All of us know the enormous costs associated with retrofitting older facilities with new systems for HVAC and lighting. But it's easy to forget that incremental gains can also be achieved through refurbishment. Fresh paint, new wall and floor coverings and other relatively low-cost interior improvements involving carpentry can enhance the attractiveness and "user experience" in virtually any facility.

Those facilities managers intent on making their properties more attractive and usable for current or potential tenants can maintain and even add value to a building through refurbishment strategies.

Unexpected dividends

In taking this approach, a "total quality" philosophy can yield additional dividends. But how can you inject such values directly into your operations in an easy, economical way? One approach is to seek out a vendor whose operating philosophy reflects a clear dedication to total quality.

Consider the way you review bids in this regard. How, for instance, does your bidder propose to manage your job? In designating a single individual as a primary contact point the quality of your project is sure to be enhanced. The quick, readily understood communications that flow between you and your service provider will pay off in higher-quality work.

Another critical quality factor lies in scheduling refurbishment work, especially if your facilities are in regular use. Educational and medical buildings, retail, office and residential settings rarely have the luxury of shutting down. Nighttime, weekend or holiday hours may be required to ensure your deadlines are met. If your corporate or institutional workforce or clients require ongoing or even unrestricted access, as is often the case in R&D, healthcare and even retail, you have a right to demand flexible scheduling without paying a premium.

All the details

In the "nuts & bolts" department all the little details in a total quality job add up to such seemingly innocuous tasks as having a contractor's cleaner at work throughout the project. Another is a philosophical commitment on the part of a vendor that no punch list items will be left at the end of an assignment. Clear, readily understood progress reports should also be a feature of your vendor's stock in trade, formatted and delivered to your requirements.

Robust capacity, a record of achievement confirmed by multiple references and outstanding craft skills are another big factor in the total quality equation. In dealing with larger facilities that must meet high standards for materials and finish, selecting a mature vendor with a long reference list is one more guarantor of success. The only surprise in most refurbishment projects is when there are no surprises. Long experience and creative problem solving are the best response to the unexpected.

No delays

In a similar vein, selecting a vendor possessed of wide familiarity with materials and supplier sourcing can help ensure your specifications and timeframe are met, if not exceeded. Being able to lay hands on hard-to-get materials or suggest cost-effective, high quality alternatives helps avoid delays. Knowing how to source the best (or an alternative) paint stock, wall or floor covering can add immeasurably to the outcome of even the most challenging project, especially when you are your own designer.

The prestige and reputation of the organization you serve (your brand) is in part contained in the "look and feel" of the facilities for which you are responsible. In sharing your commitment to total quality your vendor will be helping you achieve your employer's goals for organizational success.

When your personal quest for perfection includes a clean, efficient and even picture-perfect job, why not mix total quality into your next painting bid? The surest indicator you've made a good choice will be the smile on your boss's face!

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