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Entire project team must align objectives, agenda and expectations for success

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"I want this to be the best hotel in the city!" "We need this hotel completed in 18 months!" "The scope cannot change and the budget cannot exceed \$20 million." Often, if we are lucky enough to be part of a project kick off meeting, we hear direction firsthand from hotel owners when a project commences. It is the responsibility of the entire project team, including the ownership group, to ensure that the expectations are commensurate with the entire team's ability to deliver results on time and on budget. We often see misaligned objectives, expectations and agendas that define the overall success of a hotel construction project. The project team may be quite centered in reality, but if ownership has not been briefed on the reality of achieving the objectives, then the end result is an unsatisfied client.

Hind sight is indeed 20/20. Since 1988, our team has participated in over 300 hotel projects locally, nationally and internationally. Projects vary in scope and size from new builds to renovations for 3 to 5 star hotels. So, in the two plus decades of serving the hospitality industry with procurement services and expertise, we have seen a good cross cut of owners and project teams, and we are privileged to have played an integral role in their corresponding results.

This isn't magic. But there is a trick to achieving success when embarking on a hotel new build or renovation project. And, since many projects can be like a major Hollywood production, I offer a comparison between the movie production industry to the hotel development industry, to portray how a successful project team gets organized from the start. First, there is a decision making focal point; we'll identify that as the director, who answers to the producer (who holds the power of the purse strings). The director and producer, often one in the same, are tasked with assembling the best talent to tackle the challenge. The director brings the team together early on in the process and issues a clear objective; what is being built (or produced), what is the budget, what is the timeline? Each expert brought into the project needs to comment on the timeline and their particular roles to realistically assess their deliverables. Each team member, construction/project manager, architect, MEP consultants, interior designer, graphics designer, operations technical services and yes, the procurement partner, all have an integrated role to play in the process that often requires proper syncopation of completions and deliverables to allow the next consultant in the process to perform their work. If the work syncopation doesn't go according to plan, key milestones get missed, which set a string of tasks off course.

The movie director or project manager should continuously review any change to the sequenced schedule to accommodate adjustment and keep the team moving forward in tandem. If a task delays, the director or project manager needs to communicate the real impact to the schedule and its effect on each team member. Each team member should communicate back up to the PM regarding any anticipated issues for the team to make a proactive assessment of the project

sequencing, making adjustments and moving forward with the project honestly and realistically. Whether it's a Hollywood production or a hotel building project, agendas need to be aligned repeatedly as the project moves forward. No two team members will share an agenda, but they must be aligned. The interior designer may want to create a space so remarkable that it will gain media attention to enhance their image, which is a different agenda from the construction management team and the procurement agent who are held to the fire to come in within budget and on schedule. It is a productive practice for each party to understand and respect the agendas of each team member and what needs to be done collectively to achieve the owner's objective, or in the case of a blockbuster production, the producer. I offer another movie making analogy. A producer cannot expect to create a blockbuster movie on a B-film budget, nor can an owner expect to create a 5 star hotel on a 3 star budget. Such misaligned expectation will only result in ownership's disappointment. Of course, we all need to do more with less and it is certainly reasonable for ownership to challenge the project team to bring in a higher-end design with a challenging budget. But, the owner and the project team need to be on board with the objective while understanding each other's agendas and limitations. Clear communications relative to the owner's objectives and the project team's agenda are the key to a project's success.

Who doesn't love a challenge? What designer, project manager or procurement agent would say no to a new challenge? Even mega star Kevin Costner dreamt big and was hit hard by the reality of a losing project...look at his 1995 mega bust Waterworld! Personally, my favorite client challenges the entire team to build a 5 star hotel with a 4 star budget. Projects are kicked off with a team meeting and the owner states his objectives. The budget is established and the team integrates their expertise to achieve the set objectives. Each team member identifies their process and how these syncopate with each other. Time is allotted for costing, value engineering and providing feed back to the design team and owners. The result; an efficient team that cooperates and works together to deal with unforeseen issues that inevitably appear on every project whether it's on Main Street and Hollywood Blvd.

Skewed expectations and underlying agendas create issues in any line of work. Early alignment sets a project on the right path with a kick off strategy team meeting with all in agreement on the milestones and budgets. An experienced Hollywood director, like a hotel project director, has the experience and skill to leverage the strengths of each team member and the oversight to bring them into alignment. A cohesive, uniquely talented team works together to achieve a common goal to complete a successful project in the board room or on a movie set.

Gus Sarff, ISHC is president and owner of GS Associates, Inc., a procurement consulting firm providing FF&E and OS&E services locally, nationally and globally for luxury, convention, resort, limited service hotels, fractional ownership properties, restaurants, and function facilities. For over 25 years, GS Associates, Inc. has continued to develop procurement technology and creative sourcing to maintain its leadership in the industry. GSA's services are transparent, expert, and will make a positive impact on any project.