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A changing role in a changing world - by Michael Buono

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A construction manager's objective is to maintain efficiency and productivity, while balancing the safety of workers and trades. As construction sites re-open across the Tri-State area, budgeting for extended project lifespans, staggered workforces, and material availability are just a few of the unforeseen circumstances to navigate and contend with.

A mindset shift will have to take place within the construction industry and only those who are able to tackle these new matters with flexibility and creativity will result in projects that are not only successful, but remain true to brand ethos of the project.

Nimble and strategic staffing: I remain optimistic that in the next 12-18 months, we will have a vaccine. Until then, we are drawing from best practices and health guidelines to figure out what works and what doesn't. Programs, policies, and ideas to safeguard employees often sound great on paper, but don't necessarily yield the intended result when applied in the field.

Strategic scheduling and the creative deployment of resources has become a key function. More so than ever, we err on the side of caution and anticipate the activity and milestones within the day, rather than evaluate longer timelines as we did in the past.

For example, a lot of the work my firm completes is on the interior, as opposed to an expansive outdoor site which naturally lends itself to social distancing. On a recent project, I received a request from the tile artisan that he be the only person on site. The quality of his work is superb, and not wanting to compromise the end product, I had to restrict access for three days and identify other time efficiencies that could be created to mitigate impact.

Material procurement as creative as the design itself: Materials are often the impetus for design. In the long-term, I do not believe that the pandemic will shift sourcing from overseas. However, in the short-term, materials must be approached with a level of flexibility and creativity similar to staffing. Options should be identified and the materials should be evaluated through the lens of the finished product before compromises are made.

At the height of the pandemic, we were working on a project deemed essential. Materials selected well in advance were available, however the vendor was no longer able to facilitate delivery. Rather than deviate from the vision or allow this to cause project delays, we engaged a third-party vendor for transport.

Contractual obligations: One of the biggest challenges in the current environment is the application of contracts and cost issues that have arisen due to a 100-plus day pause. When you sign a contract, part of your contractual agreement is that you are going to execute a project within a certain time period. However, your efficiencies now are totally different. You simply can't work as you did previously in terms of manpower and sequencing.

The question is, what is that contract going to look like going forward understanding there is a ton of

uncertainty based on potential interruptions due to a second wave? It will be prudent to include provisions into future contracts for the foreseeable future that incorporates language around these types of circumstances and these caveats. It's an incredibly fascinating area and will be interesting to see how it evolves.

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