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The Other Side of the Story

In our last Newsletter, we discussed the need for some better understanding of the value of the QBS to project clients but this may be only part of the story. Early in our childhood, we were told, “There are two sides to every story”. If this is the case, what is the other side of the story about the value of QBS?

It is relatively easy to demonstrate and explain the value of the QBS Process to knowledgeable clients and to public officials that have an understanding of what design professionals are expected to do, the process that is normally used to transform a “good idea” into the facility that the client expects while meeting all of the budget and time constraints as well as building code, ADA and energy efficiency requirements. But what about clients that are not knowledgeable of the services that are normally provided or the process that is normally used to bring the “good idea” into reality? Even the best of intentions and the appropriate use of QBS may not overcome some very basic lack of understanding on the part of the Client.

From my experience, few members of “Building Committees” on publicly financed projects are selected based on their knowledge of the design or construction process. They are selected because they are influential Community Leaders. Their service on the Building Committee is frequently to give the local taxpayers confidence that their interests are being considered and protected. Most Building Committee Members get “high marks” for serving in this capacity and the taxpayers have a sense of confidence in the process.

However, the QBS Process which is dependent upon a clear understanding of “QUALIFICATIONS” may suffer if the Design Firm and the Client are not speaking the same language or one is using terminology that is not fully understood by the other. We all use acronyms or phrases that are understood by those in our own fields but may not be understood by those in a different profession. I used to become upset when my computer would “freeze” and my IT guy would come in and quickly fix the problem and then explain what had gone wrong using IT terms that I had no idea what they meant. I didn’t ask for an explanation as I knew that the explanation would include many more terms that I did not understand, so I quit only to repeat the problem again a few weeks later.

As design professionals making presentations to clients about the firm’s qualification, do we consider the knowledge and understanding of the design process by the Committee that is holding the interview? Even the best presentation may not be successful if it is not understood. Communications has two parts, not only must the message be sent, it also has to be received with the “receiver” having the same understanding of content as the person that sent the message. A misunderstood message may be of less value than no message. Unfortunately, low bids are easy to understand but understanding qualifications may be more difficult.

This may be the “Other side of the Story” if a good presentation is not well received.

For more information about the Maine QBS Program, visit the QBS Website www.meqbs.org
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