

Selecting A Firm



by

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A successful building project begins with the Building Committees choice of a company. The typical mindset of those on a building committee is to seek the firm that offers the lowest square footage cost with the least amount of commitment from the church. On the surface this seems like a reasonable and pragmatic "due diligence" approach to achieving a level of security and safety. The truth is, it only increases the level of risk for the church and enables the company to be less accountable.

Another way to state the Building Committees objective is, "we are looking for a long term relationship without commitment, and we want cheap quality. No relationship that is worth being involved in can succeed with little or no commitment. And believe me your building project is a long-term commitment, by not only your members, but by the firm you hire. As far as the "bargain basement mentality," remember this, " The bitterness of poor quality lasts long after the sweetness of low price has been forgotten."

Any firm that breaks out the building process automatically invites other building professionals into the mix, which in turn creates a division of responsibilities. This begins the dilution of accountability, and according to Richard P. Flake, Attorney of Construction Law, " Each profession is reluctant to become involved in the other's portion of the work in any manner that may increase their exposure to liability." Building committees should be looking at a company that is focused on building a team that has the personnel capable of taking the project from planning and concept to a finished product.

The most commonly asked question during an interview by the building committee is, " What is your average square footage cost?" It should be a red flag for concern to your committee if the company you are interviewing (especially at this stage of your project) gives you a " low ball" cost range like, " Oh, it ranges from \$50 to \$95 a square foot." Believe me when I tell you that the Architectural and Construction Industry are very much aware that "low bid" wins. Change orders occur for the most part so that the GC and his Sub-Contractors can make up for their "low bid."

It is important that you don't make a decision based on a range of costs by a company you have just met. First of all they are not giving you a guarantee, so as the old adage says, "it's not worth the paper it's printed on." If you still want to ask this question then follow up with another question, "in what areas of our new building will you be cutting costs to get it down that cheap?" Most firms cut their square footage cost by cutting into the quality of materials and systems.

The best question to ask the interviewing company about their square footage costs is, "what methods have you incorporated in your building process that will help drive down costs in areas that don't affect the size, scope and quality of our building project." There is only one thing you want cheap and that is the interest on the money you will borrow.

