

# In The News: Building on Success: How to Keep Your Subcontractors Happy

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Any contractor will tell you that your reputation is only as good as the subcontractors you hire. Even the best laid plans will go awry if your subcontractors can't meet your goals.

Like any employees that you hire, they have to be the right fit for your business and share both your vision and work ethic. Conduct thorough interviews and be sure to check references. Trust your research and your instincts. In an industry where news travels fast, a good or bad reputation will be evident early on.

The majority of subcontractors are freelance and many work on multiple jobs at different locations throughout the course of a given week. If you don't have your craftspeople "locked in" for a particular job, you risk countless delays that will have a "domino effect" on the rest of the job. If you are working within strict parameters including tight deadlines, going off-track can ruin your reputation by forcing you to break promises to the client.

Rather than complaining about the cracks in your plan, consider that you might not have built the best foundation to work from. The onus is on you to keep subcontractors busy and happy. The real pros are driven to do their best work, meet deadlines, and extend themselves to get things done. They're also your connection to the client when you're not on-site.

If you want to optimize the work your crews do, and run a project effectively, it's important to follow these guidelines:

### **Plan ahead**

Pre-planning for a construction project should begin weeks, if not months out. You may have to stagger shifts depending on when your stock supply arrives, what phase of building you're in, and how the weather cooperates. You can't expect to hire crews as you need them without losing money.

As a general contractor or project superintendent, be sure to coordinate your crews effectively. If they're working for you one week, then off the next and back the following week, it allows them to fill their schedule with other projects. To hold them to an unstructured schedule is unfair and does little to create a team atmosphere.

### **Make sure they're productive**

There are times when delays can't be helped. Always work in a few extra days for a job to ensure that you meet your deadline. Usually, subcontractors are hired for a specific project and paid a lump sum for their work. If you don't finish on time, they'll lose work and you'll encounter delays, which will also affect your profitability in the long run.

### **Keep your word about timing**

Creating a loyal, hard-working crew requires you to stick to your word when it comes to start and completion dates. In addition to cutting down on efficiency and revenues, broken promises can also compromise your workers' reliability. If they show up only to find there's a half day of work, or no work at all, they will be less than enthusiastic the next time you call. If you don't live up to your end of the bargain, there's no reason they will do the same.

### **Agree to terms of payment, and pay them on time**

If you operate under the premise that your subcontractors will get paid when you get paid, your business sense is lacking. Enter into a written contract with each one before the first nail is hammered in. Agree to terms of payment up front to avoid problems later.

Most importantly, make sure you pay your subcontractors on time for their services. If the work is done, they deserve their paycheck. Too many companies drag out the process and lose the respect of their subs. Be fair: if you encounter a billing or cash-flow problem, let them know. Most times, they'll give you some leeway if your payment history is current.

### **Communicate with them**

Keep the lines of communication open with your subcontractors and your clients. If the client praises their work, let them know. If the opposite happens, immediately resolve the issues in person.

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*If you can envision it,  
we can build it.*

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Drop by the work site as often as possible to make sure the job is running smoothly. If there's a delay, or bad news to relay to a client, your Project Superintendents should solve any immediate problems. They are your on-site representatives. Your subcontractors should never be expected to handle those types of issues when they come up. The Supers should bring you into the loop as soon as possible to ensure that they convey your messages correctly, and deliver any feedback that you need to hear.

### **Feed them**

This may seem obvious, but make sure you take care of your subcontractors' most basic needs. If they're working in frigid cold, spring for hot coffee or cold drinks if they're toiling away in the heat of summer. If it's crunch time on a project, and your crew is working around the clock, buy them lunch or dinner. They often can't leave a job site if they're under the gun, and short money upfront will keep them going to meet your deadlines.

Subcontractors, like any other workers, want fair working conditions, equitable pay, and longevity with their general contractor. They are a unique breed that holds the key to your success – especially if you're looking to build a strong foundation for your business. At a time when the construction industry as a whole is seeing a slowdown, having the most talented and committed people on hand to do the job will help you meet your objectives on time, every time.

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### **About Vision Builders Co.:**

*Vision Builders is a nationally-Recognized new breed of general contracting and construction management firm with a business model that places equal emphasis on the quality of the client experience as the quality of the finished product. It focuses on developing close working relationships built upon shared vision, open dialog, and skilled craftsmanship. The private firm, established in 2005, works with new and existing companies in a variety of industries that require renovations and construction build-outs. Vision Builders has completed projects for several restaurants, well-known retail operation Work 'n Gear, with locations in Maine, Massachusetts, New York, Connecticut, New Jersey and Pennsylvania, and national Chain Mattress Discounters, with location in Virginia and Massachusetts.*



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