

Installments

Evolution Of The Revolution

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Why have so many people failed to realize that today's flooring experts are dedicated to the advancement of our industry? A true definition of our industry must include manufacturers, architects, designers, entrepreneur flooring experts and satisfied customers. All of these components need to have a positive experience in the equation; a mistake or lapse in performance by any one component leads to a failed project that impacts everyone. It is interesting to note that of all these components, the installer is always looked upon as the weakest link.

Manufacturers flaunt their quality control, size, product diversity, manufacturing expertise and strength in using the latest technology to bring the best products ever made to market. Designers and architects stress their educational accomplishments, previous award winning designs and development of overall themes to assure their toughest client's satisfaction with their unique designs. However, their success is contingent on the weakest link—the installer.

Guardians Of Our Industry

In speaking for the installer, I contend we are not the weakest link, but the guardians of our industry. We are the entrepreneurs who are continually in the forefront of bringing professionalism to the equation. We are the ones who join organizations such as StarNet, The Flooring Experts, participate in the Floor Covering Installation Contractors Association (FCICA), become certified by the Floor Covering Installation Board (FCIB) and undergo a performance review every two years to retain that certification.

We believe in continuing education for our installers. For example, we participate in OSHA's 30-hour safety course and certification by different manufacturers for technical competence in installing their products. Due to the complexity of the backing systems, continuing education is not an option but an absolute necessity. Knowledge of the product is mandatory for a successful installation.

High Expectations

Moisture problems in concrete have significantly increased in the last 10 years due to fast track construction, lack of moisture controls, improperly installed vapor barriers and lack of good building sites. It sometimes seems we are being turned into chemists instead of flooring contractors; we are expected to analyze moisture content with calcium chloride tests or use the latest technology, relative to humidity tests. We must be vigilant with every type of material installed. Moisture vapor emissions must

be within the manufacturer's guidelines or we put the installation (and ourselves) at peril.

Our client needs must be dealt with for we are the ones who specify products; we will investigate the needs of our clients and respond with just the right product. If a client has an architect or designer, we offer ourselves and our showroom to help in their design consideration. We approach the whole specification process with an eye toward technical capabilities, as well as ethics.

Flooring Experts

Flooring is one of the last trades to arrive on the job site. Frequently, it is a jobsite beset by a shortened construction schedule, delays by other trades, heightened tensions between architect, builder or end user. We arrive as her savior, the trade that will put the finishing touches on her pride and joy. We are her flooring contractor who can install her materials in a shortened time, faster and better than anybody. She has faith in us, we are the flooring experts.

Our industry, through its consolidation, has shortened payment terms and combined lines of credit. Some people think this is bad. However, I think it's a great inducement for the industry to do business with companies who value their credit worthiness, have the ability to pay manufacturers and realize the importance of a sound and balanced financial statement.

Recipe For Disaster

While the industry has tightened credit, most of our customers have slowed down their payment cycles until they are double what they were 10 years ago. The 30-day payment to manufacturer and 70-day payment from our customer base is a perfect recipe for economic disaster. A professional attitude toward receivables collection is mandatory for survival. The ability to say no to a bad job is the ability to stay in business.

So, a successful flooring contractor who used to be known as a back charge artist, trunk slammer, pick-up truck installer or van delivery service, has evolved to become an accountant, banker, chemist, designer, diplomat, specifier, teacher and a continuing education specialist for the next generation of flooring personnel. We are not the weakest link in the chain. We are the heart and soul of our industry, we care about our customers, we strive to sell the best products available and deliver the best installation. We are not an unnecessary layer of profitability. So, stand up and be counted. We are the ones who ensure profitability for all.

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