



10 Critical Considerations for Your Design & Build Team

Buying design and construction services have never been an easy task for the church. In today's economic climate, the challenge has become exponentially more difficult as firms struggle with a myriad of internal and external challenges. So, how does a church go about selecting a design and build team that they will work very closely with for one to three years?

Many churches have made the mistake of selecting this long term relationship – a “marriage” of sorts – without diligently “digging into” who they will really be working with. There are ten key attributes that every church, that is considering building, needs to understand about their design and build team prior to the “wedding”:

- Teamwork
- Chemistry
- Organization
- Accountability
- Open Book Accounting
- Cost Control
- Quality Control
- Current Experience
- Corporate Resources
- Current References!!!

Before you embark on the largest expenditure of God's resources, in your lifetime, let's “dig into” the finer points of the ten key attributes that your design and build team needs to possess.

Team Work

Has your design and build team successfully worked together in the past? The success of your building project is found in the previous successes of your design and build team. Their ability to work together with the singular goal of serving you and your church, without agenda, is paramount. Success can be measured by their ability to consistently deliver a design solution that can be built, with quality, and within the set budget.

Chemistry

Do you like the design and build team that you will work with? You will likely spend a few years with these people. Make sure that you know them and like them. An important question during the interview is, “Are you the one that I will be working with?” You want knowledgeable and personable team members leading this venture. The people that will actually manage the pre-construction, design and construction of your project may not be the flashiest salesmen in town, but they will be the people that you are about to make a long term commitment to for the design and build of your new facility. Make sure that the people you interview for your project are also the people who will design and build your new facility.



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Organization

Is the team aligned in a way to provide long term value and owner advocacy? How your design and build team is aligned affects several things, most notably the cost of a project. The levels, or layers, of management tend to drive the cost of your project as the overhead structures of the design and build team have to be paid for somehow. Look for “Lean” teams where you are working directly with team members who are directly responsible for your project without multiple layers of assistants and management. Owner advocacy in the design and build world can be difficult. The architect is often tabbed as the owners advocate. This is typically true, unless he is a payroll staff member of the builder. Select design and build teams that include an independent architect. This arrangement will offer the advocacy that you need, the creativity that you want, along with the cost and value engineering that is critical for budget control.

Accountability

Is the team aligned in a way to provide financial and project accountability? The above attribute of organization plays directly into accountability. The process of designing and building places of worship should be looked at as a three-legged stool: the church, the architect, and the builder. Each independent leg of the stool is critical to the project’s success. The strength of the team depends on the synergy between each, the collective knowledge of each, and most importantly, the accountability that each provides to the others. A design and build approach where each leg of the stool is independent and valued will provide the best solution to the church along with an accountability that is difficult to attain when everything is all packaged up.

Open Book Accounting

Does the team allow Open Book bidding and accounting of your project costs? Construction accounting is not always as straight forward as one might think. Be sure to that you have firm commitments from your builder on what his monthly general conditions costs are along with his overhead and profit percentage. Many times a low overhead and profit percentage is made up in an extremely high monthly general conditions fee. If you secure both figures from your builder, a quantitative analysis can take place. The other major component of your project costs are the subcontractors who will actually build your building. Make sure that your builder allows your team to review the bids and select qualified subcontractors for your project. The simple act of making the numbers open for review alleviates any perception of misappropriation of God’s resources.



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Cost Control

Does the team have a process with multiple, real (not estimated) cost control checkpoints? Construction costs have tended to be more volatile over the last few years. Estimating current projects with data from past projects is becoming increasingly more difficult as the commodity and labor markets continue to fluctuate. A cost control process with multiple checkpoints that are generated from actual subcontractors in your locale is the only recommended way to stay on track. An older Barna statistic states that over 50% of America's churches have a set of plans that they will never build. The primary reason is a budget bust. In today's economy, that risk is much higher. Make sure that your team has a proven procedure for establishing your construction costs and that they do it with subcontractors that are performing this type of work in your region.

Quality Control

Does the team have a written procedure for quality control? Few teams will come into an interview and state that they will build "OK quality" or "So-So quality". Everyone you interview will state that "we build quality". Even the smallest addition to your church involves multiple trades and even more types of materials. The best project superintendent in the world cannot keep every thing in his head that he needs to check to insure a quality project. Ask your team for a written quality control program. If quality is really that important, the builder should be able to present a tried and true written program that insures that even the smallest of details will not be missed.

Corporate Resources

Is the team church-focused, but diverse enough to survive the financial ups and downs of today's marketplace? A team that is church-focused is essential to understanding you, designing a facility that will enhance your ministry and then building the facility with a minimum amount of ministry distraction. A team that is solely focused on church, without any other experience, may miss out on secular design concepts that will make your place of worship a true community draw. A team that has a mix of applicable and complementary experience can bring a wealth of additional knowledge into the design process and a tremendous amount of financial stability to the long term relationship and warranty support for your new facility.



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Current Experience

Has the team performed successfully, and recently, for others? The best predictor of your experience will be the experience that the previous church had with your team. Look for time gaps in your team's resume. This may, often times, include a bad project or two. If you meet a builder that states he will build problem free, he either has not built or he is less than honest. Every project has challenges: find out how the team rose to the challenge and dealt with it to the church's satisfaction. Projects that are omitted from a builders resume should be a "flag" to be looked into further.

Current References!!!

Is the team that you will work with the same team that served the references listed? Churches may think that they don't need to check the references if the team is willing to supply them. It is likely that a reference provided may share a positive report about their experience, but dig deeper. There are three critical questions to ask at this stage, along with sub-questions:

- 1) Who, by name, designed and built your facility? The architect, the pre-construction manager, the project manager and the superintendent.
 - i. Are they the same team that will build for you?
 - ii. Are they even with the firm any longer?
- 2) What project challenge arose and how did the team resolve it to your satisfaction?
 - i. Every job has a challenge, how it is dealt with sets firms apart.
- 3) Would you hire this team to design and build for you again?
 - i. The ultimate question. Many times, people shy away from saying anything negative about their experience. This final question cuts to the core of the references experience.

A great design and build team, with a heart to serve the Lord, can make what could be a time of ministry distraction a time of ministry focus. The selection of that team to serve you becomes a paramount decision that every church building team must make. The people that you will work with will make all the difference in the world. Be prayerful. Be diligent. Be thorough. Ask the tough questions. If you follow this guide leading up to the "wedding", a beautiful "marriage" will be the result.

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Article as Published in Church Solutions Magazine, Virgo Publishing, July 2009