



Building Committee Advice from a Construction Industry “Top Gun”

I recently had the pleasure of designing and building a church facility with a building chairman whose own design and build experience dwarfed my own. Mike Martin’s experience over his 34 years with Duke Construction, the construction arm of a seven billion dollar publically traded company based in Indianapolis, has covered projects for Top 50 Companies and several million square feet of space built. Mike’s experience makes him a “Top Gun” construction manager in the industry.

Upon completion of his church’s project, I couldn’t resist an “interview” about his role as the building chairman and what advice he had for other churches getting ready to begin the process of designing, building, or re-purposing new space. The following is a summary of three simple questions that did not necessarily yield simple answers:

- What is your advice for a Building Chairman?
- What is your advice concerning the Building Committee?
- What is your advice concerning the Congregation?

From my experience, most building chairman would like their information as succinct and to the point, as possible. Mike was no exception.

Advice for the Building Chairman

- The Building Chairman must have:
 - A solid walk with the Lord.
 - A commitment to prayer.
 - The heart of a servant.
 - Understand that the role is one of ministry.
 - A clear grasp of the ministry vision of the church.
 - The gift of leadership.
 - An understanding spirit for others who lack knowledge of construction
 - Especially if the chairman has extensive experience in the industry.
 - The gift of effective communication.
 - Time to invest in the process.
 - The ability to “take control”.
 - Not necessarily the most popular “attribute”, but one that must sometimes be exercised as it deals with difficult and complex decisions with the designer, the builder, the building committee, and the congregation.



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Advice Concerning the Building Committee

- The Building Chairman should secure from the church’s ruling board:
 - Clear direction as it pertains to authority, scope and budget for the project.
 - Clear direction and expectations of the building committee.

- The Building Chairman must be aware, be sensitive to, and always be coaching/reminding of:
 - The vision of the church.
 - The scope and budget constraints for the project.
 - The process of designing and building a facility.
 - Don’t overestimate the understanding of the church leadership and even the building committee of what goes into the designing and building of a new facility, including finance, government and regulatory issues and decision making challenges.
 - Encourage questions from the committee members and church leadership to insure understanding.
 - The only silly question is the one not asked. A bunch of guys in charge of designing and building a new church may not be willing to admit that they don’t understand a construction term or circumstance.
 - The confidentiality of the meetings.
 - Good communication to the congregation of decisions and finances is critical to the success of every project. However, the decision making process within the building committee should be kept confidential.

- The Building Chairman, with church leadership, should look for the following types of building committee members:
 - A committee/team of three to five members maximum, which should include a diversity of people whom have gifts in areas like:
 - Prayer
 - Communications
 - Finance
 - Ministry
 - Construction
 - Furnishings
 - Building Operations



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- All building committee/team members should:
 - Have a solid walk with the Lord.
 - Have a solid commitment to Prayer.
 - Have some leadership/executive experience.
 - Have a clear understanding of the vision for the ministry.
 - Look at the whole and not just specific parts.
 - Look at the long range and not just the short term.
 - Actively engage the church leadership and congregation to discern needs from wants, in the case of priority of areas.
 - Work well with others and enjoy the other members company.
 - Bring wisdom, discernment, vision and common sense to the team.
 - Understand that, especially in the beginning, there is a significant time commitment that must be made for success.

Advice Concerning the Congregation

- The Building Chairman must be sensitive to:
 - The fact that the congregation is human and often does not understand how buildings are designed and built.
 - Input from the congregation that will come from multiple directions and will not always be constructive during various periods of the process.
 - The desire of congregation members to get “involved” on the jobsite.
 - It is important for excited congregation members to be able to see, close up, the progress being made on the site. Safety and productivity must always prevail.
- The Building Chairman and church leadership can “help” with some of the above challenges by:
 - Encouraging involvement from as many ministry leaders as possible during the design phase of the project.
 - Regularly updating the congregation on the project’s progress with avenues such as.
 - Information placed in the weekly bulletin
 - Announcements every Sunday on progress
 - Progress updates given by the Design-Builder

I hope that the wisdom imparted above from a 40-year veteran of the building industry, the chairman of a successful building program for his church, and whose heart is to help other’s was beneficial. I am a firm believer that if you are not learning, you are dying. I learn something new on every project that I have had the privilege of being involved with and from every building chairman I have served...this interview was like trying to get a



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drink from a fire hydrant. My deep appreciation goes to Mike for his heart to bless others by sharing his experience and insights detailed in this article.

“Blessed is the man who finds wisdom, the man who gains understanding, for she is more profitable than silver and yields better returns than gold.” – Proverbs 3:13-14

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