

# A Refresher Course in Project Management

**By Joseph Carbonara, Editor-in-Chief -- Foodservice Equipment & Supplies, 7/1/2006**

One of the most critical aspects to remaining in a client's good graces is managing their projects to meet their expectations. But exactly what it takes to manage a project successfully can mean different things to different people. So, we asked several industry veterans to share what their years' of experience has taught them. Here's what they had to say.

## **Good Relations**

"I need them to believe that I am looking out for their best interests and that I am the protector of the plan and the client," said Howard Stanford, president of KSA in Fishers, Ind. "Once that is done, everything else is relatively simple. If they don't feel that I will hold to and protect their needs, then we have all sorts of problems."

Stanford starts developing a sound working relationship with his clients during the sales process by sharing with them "the passion I have for what I do." In addition, Stanford tries to create an environment that encourages clients to ask questions, no matter how strange. At the same time, Stanford is quick to point out that he does not have all the answers but commits to finding them for his clients.

The sound relationship serves as a foundation that stabilizes the project moving forward. "Then we can sit down and discuss equipment, the relationships they have and what does and does not work for them," Stanford said. "That helps me set a basis for where to start."

## **Understanding Goals and Objectives**

"Most of it starts at the beginning by establishing what they are looking for rather than designing a project," said Michael Johnson, principal of Hilliker Associates in Marietta, Ga. "You have to listen not only to what they say but also to what they want. Once you get on the same page, then it's a series of flow charts."

And according to Johnson, it is important for everyone who touches the project to have the same understanding of its goals and objectives. "When we come back from a meeting with our notes, we write them up and give them to everyone, even the plumbers and electricians. That way everybody has a copy of what we understand the client directed us to do and the corresponding time frame.

"Then, everything goes a lot smoother and you don't have as many headaches."

## **Proper Scheduling**

"It takes expertise, time and money to develop a new restaurant, and independent

operators need to understand this and listen to professionals if they have any real hopes of completing their projects in time,” said Eric F. Nusbaum, Ph.D., CHA. Nusbaum is president of Greenfield, Mass.-based Wheelwright Consultants.

“They should probably plan on everything taking longer than expected and plan to open a number of weeks prior to the start of their first season both to allow for some sliding of the schedule and to allow the staff to work out some of the bugs and ramp up for business before things get busy,” Nusbaum said. “Someone has to develop a realistic schedule and watch it and make it happen, otherwise it will not.”

### **Shared Terminology**

“We have terminology that applies to our industry only, or conflicts with other industries and that can cause misinterpretations and real problems down the line,” said Ron Kooser, president of Cini Little. “One of the key things I try to do to make a project move more smoothly is to get all of the team speaking the same language, and that changes on the type of project.

“For instance, when we in the industry talk about "retail operations" we are talking about foodservice that looks or presents a non-institutional appearance or impression,” he said. “When you use that term with an architect, or someone else, it obviously means to them hard goods or maybe even non-food items.

“This is also true when we work on hospital projects that include "room service," when in fact people in our own industry don't have a common understanding of what that means. So, it is important to make sure everyone is on the same page.”