

# Building Winning Project Teams

By Amelia Levin, Associate Editor -- Foodservice Equipment & Supplies, 10/1/2006

What's the most important thing a consultant can do to make sure the design process runs smoothly?

Give other players in the project every bit of information they need to do their jobs, says James Camacho, president of [Camacho Associates](#). Lori Schroeder, consultant and principal and owner of [S3 Consultants](#), would agree. "Anticipate what each discipline is going to need, when they're going to need it, and have it complete and ready for them," she says.

A utility load list is perhaps the most crucial piece of information that architects and engineers need to have upfront, according to Schroeder. "Getting utilities verified is very important," she says. "You need to know if you're using natural gas, propane or electric. You need to know if there's 480-watt voltage available or only 208." In addition, it's important to know what sewage systems are in place, or let the architect know if you're planning for any roof penetration or other things that will affect the building construction.

"Accuracy of these documents is critical because all the other disciplines are designing to what we say we're going to need or require," she adds. "The quicker you can produce the most accurate information the better off everyone else is — no one's making guesses. The further along the mistake gets in the process, the more expensive it gets to correct. The worst that can happen is the equipment arrives and the utilities are not what was stated."

Camacho says he relies on in-person meetings with the architects, engineers and other players to make sure a project runs smoothly. It's important to put together all the drawings, specifications and other details and go over them thoroughly in those early meetings, he says. "It takes very little time to do — making sure everyone has everything they need — but it saves a tremendous amount of time."

**Acting as a Liaison**  
But even before those initial meetings, the first and foremost thing to do is be upfront with the client, and act as their liaison to the other team players, says Howard Stanford, president of [Kamau Sage & Associates](#) and former president of FCSI's North America division.

"Tell the client who you are and why you're there," Stanford says. "Generally, what we (consultants) like to be is the client's representative throughout the project. That way we're responsible for making sure what the team players do in regards to the foodservice portion."

On top of that, Stanford says it's important to remain connected to the client throughout the project, including during the installation and start-up period, and even after the end-user takes over. That way the consultant can help address any issues that may pop up.

Stanford says he's had operators and end-users approach him and say they are shocked to hear him explain that, in his opinion, part of the consultants' job is to take the helm on a project and act as a liaison between all the players. The reality is, he says, taking the helm is not much extra work, and the huge benefit of this approach is that the consultant builds a stronger relationship with the client. In turn, that stronger relationship will lead to more jobs and a better reputation in the field, Stanford says. In addition, there is a chance for landing more jobs directly through the client rather than through an architect, which means more control over a project and faster pay.

**When Problems Arise**  
Problems arise when communication breaks down, and people go around the consultant to get to the client. "The bigger the lack of coordination grows, the more the entire coordination process goes out the window," Stanford says.

Having a strong consultant-client relationship, meaning going above and beyond the call of duty for the client and keeping the lines of communication constantly open, helps consultants stay out of trouble if problems arise. On the other hand, "If the relationship with the client is superficial, you'll be the first one they blame," Stanford says.

If the consultant has a good rapport with the end-user and there is a problem, the client will take a different approach. "They will call and say, 'I have this problem, can you help me solve it?' I then might say, 'This is who you need to call, or I'll call them and tell them to give you a call.' If the client understands the chain of command, and who's responsible for what, it's a lot easier to answer the client's questions and concerns."

Schroeder says the best thing to do when problems arise is to try and make recommendations to find the cheapest way to do deal with the issue. The biggest problem is if there's something wrong with a large and custom piece of equipment.

**Ongoing Challenges**  
Camacho says a major challenge he faces is fitting in the time to review the engineers' drawings thoroughly to make sure they fit his original specifications for voltage, floor drains and other details. Despite working nine- or 10-hour days, six or seven days a week, this remains an ongoing challenge.

For Schroeder, challenges sometimes arise with the architects who make the deadlines and basically "drive the bus" on her projects. "We can't do anything until the architect gives us our background on the space we're working in."