

Speechworks

ASHER COMMUNICATIONS

Pitching to Win:

How Construction Superintendents, Project Managers, and Estimators Can Shine During New Business Interviews.

In commercial construction, the new business interview has largely become a chance for the owner to meet the superintendent, the project manager, and the estimator. And while owners do not expect construction professionals to be dynamic, highly-polished public speakers, the project team does need to instill confidence and connect with the owners on a personal level.

Ultimately, the goal is to have the owners say, "I like those guys. I'm confident that they can handle this project. And I'm looking forward to spending the next one or two years working with them."

Here are five keys that superintendents, project managers, and estimators should follow to ensure that they shine during a new business interview.



Key 1: *Identify Owner Hot Buttons*

The best business pitches avoid speaking broadly about firm qualifications and instead directly address owner-concerns and challenges posed by the particular project. If the owner is concerned about getting local subcontractor participation, then the pitch should address that concern.

If it's a building renovation, the owner might be concerned about how the contractor can build the project without undue disruption of the building's workflow. Other potential hot buttons include: managing lay-down and staging areas in a tight site, dealing with underground utilities, or concern about rock that could slow construction. The primary focus of the presentation should be plans to deal with these hot buttons.

We coached a construction team on a pitch for a major hospital renovation. The team had learned from a consultant that the major concern on the part of the owners was that there be "no surprises." With that in mind, we structured the entire presentation around plans to ensure that there were no surprises, even in the inevitable event that problems arose during the project.

Key 2: *How Superintendents, Project Managers, and Estimators Should Organize their Thoughts*

Team members should address their plans for solving the problems represented by hot buttons. We recommend a simple “Point-Plan-Story-Commitment” approach.

Point: This is a simple statement that you’re going to effectively manage one of the owner’s hot button issues. Directness impresses the owner that you’re a clear communicator.

Example:

“We know that this project is being done in a high population density area and that you’re concerned about safety. We’re going to make this a very safe site.”

Plan: Next, the speaker should lay out a plan for how to address the hot button issues. Once again, great presentations lay out plans for solving and addressing the prospect’s key concerns.

Example:

“Our plan for ensuring that this is a safe site involves several things. First, we will build pedestrian tunnels in key zones around the work site. We will carefully wall off the work areas, keeping non-construction personnel away from dangerous areas. We also will put netting above all pedestrian areas.”



Story: Next, the speaker should tell a story about how he has successfully executed similar plans for other projects. Stories build credibility and separate you from the competition. Only you can tell your success stories.

Example:

“We recently completed a similar renovation project for Johnson City Development in Memphis. They were renovating a 20-story office building project as well as adding on a new 20-story building. There were business people working in and around the project and we had to be careful to complete the project without disrupting business. Using covered walkways and netting, we were able to complete that project without a single construction-related injury. In fact, there was no property damage done to any of the nearby sites. The building owner told us, ‘We’d love to have you come back and build another one for us. You did great.’ Our goal is for you to want to give a similarly positive testimonial when this project is done.”

Commitment: Finally, the speaker should tell the decision-making panel of his own commitment to ensure that the hot button issue is addressed in a satisfactory way. Commitment statements are a powerful way to end a section of a presentation. They show the speaker’s eagerness to do great work for the owner.

Example:

“I know that you’re concerned about safety. But you’re not half as concerned about it as I am. In my 25 years of building buildings, I’ve never had someone not go home from one of my sites. And I plan to continue that record. I’m committed to ensuring that you have the safest site in town. I’m going to make you happy.”

Key 3: *Prepare for Questions*

The most important part of any presentation is when the owners get a chance to ask questions. You want questions because you want to address what is on their mind. With that in mind, one third to one half of the presentation time should be reserved for Q&A.

And, to our mind, you're not prepared for the interview if you haven't exhaustively prepared for Q&A. That means brainstorming a list of 20 to 30 possible questions, how you plan to answer them, and who will handle them when they arise.

We constantly hear from clients who tell us, "When the Q&A got going, we had a great conversation. That's when we knew that things were going well."

The best presentation teams that we've worked with spend a lot of time preparing for Q&A.

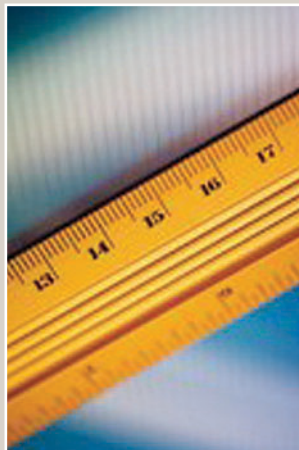


Key 4: *Speak with Energy*

When we're picking a builder, we know that the firms on the short list can all do a good job. Much of the decision comes down to how well we click with the people presenting. We just want to feel comfortable with the people on a personal level."

Those are the words of the vice president of construction management for a major food company. Superintendents, project managers, and estimators do not need to be dynamic presenters. Owners don't expect that. But owners do want to like the people they're going to work with.

We recommend that presenters speak with the same intensity that they would have if they were speaking to a close friend about something they were very excited about. Usually that means speaking quickly and with lots of facial animation. Too often we see construction personnel speak with blank expressions and no voice energy. To get people to be more animated, we have people exaggerate their facial and vocal energy. While it may feel exaggerated, usually it comes across very well to the owner.



Key 5: *Rehearse*

Nothing is more important to winning a pitch than rehearsal. This is especially true with people that don't give many presentations such as superintendents, project managers, and estimators. We worked with a superintendent who had only given a handful of pitches in his entire career. But he was extremely serious about practicing until he knew his lines and was ready to nail it. And that's exactly what he did. In fact, the owners commented that, "We're going to give you the job. But only if you can guarantee that we're getting Jim as our superintendent."

Rehearsal is also important to ensure that the team comes across as a cohesive unit and not as a group of folks that have been pulled together to try and win a job. So often, presentations fail because the presenters disagree with each other or interrupt each other. It's unprofessional and makes a very bad impression.



One of our clients once asked us what they should do if they don't have time for everyone to rehearse as a team. We responded, "Lower your expectations of winning."

As one great football coach once said, "Everyone has the will to win. But few have the will to prepare." Rehearse as if your cash flow depended on it.

About Us

Over the last 20 years, Speechworks has helped construction clients win more than \$1 billion in new business. Our two-day workshops are mandatory training for many of our construction clients' team members. We also conduct special custom programs aimed specifically at coaching superintendents, project managers, and estimators in how to shine during new business interviews. If you're interested in learning more call us at 404-266-0888 or check out our website at www.speechworks.net.