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PLANNING FOR PROBLEMS

In this section, and in greater detail in the '*Communication*' section, we offer some guidance in heading off problems through methods that contain and control difficult situations. It is often possible to channel disputes into areas where they can be quickly and quietly resolved. Even when these techniques do not achieve that result, they are useful in clarifying the issues and setting up both a paper trail and a pattern of communication, rather than accusation and recrimination.

Like anything else in business, relationships with the other parties in a construction project can and should be managed. On a small project, it might be as simple as checking in with a small number of people on a scheduled basis to exchange information and review progress. On a larger project, more formal and rigidly scheduled meetings may be necessary, complete with agenda and minutes. In either case, the goals are the same: avoid problems before they happen, resolve disputes and, above all, keep the project moving towards a successful conclusion so that everyone involved makes a profit.

Partnering

There is more detail about partnering in the '*Communication*' section, but for purposes of this section, it is probably enough to say that it is a process that establishes procedures for resolving disputes at an early stage. Typically, once the three parties in the construction process—the client, design professional and contractor—agree with the concept, a partnering workshop is held. There, as a team, participants develop a strategy for problem solving so managers can address issues quickly and efficiently. The benefits of partnering have been shown to include:

- ✓ Lower exposure to claims
- ✓ Lower risk of overruns
- ✓ Better quality of work
- ✓ Increased productivity
- ✓ Faster decision making

Resolve problems quickly, at the appropriate level

Often, resolving problems quickly means resolving them as close as possible to the scene of the difficulty. The dispute should move up the chain of command only after the two sides have tried and failed to reach an agreement. At that point, managers at the next level should make sure their people have done their best to contain the problem before going through the exercise again.

Managers at each level should try to develop confidence in the people working for them, and demonstrate that confidence through delegation.