

Waste in Construction: *You have to be able to see it, if you want to eliminate it.*

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Waste in Construction: You have to be able to see it, if you want to eliminate it.

Written by Julie Glassmeyer

Imagine it's a beautiful day in the middle of April. You walk around your jobsite and find that your 100-worker craft force is humming along like a well-oiled machine. Inside, the first floor drywall is being finished, second floor drywall is being hung, rough-in and studs are well underway on the third and fourth floors. The roofers are making better time than their foreman anticipated, and the windows are being installed, according to plan. You might actually be dried in by the end of the week!

You walk to your trailer with a smile on your face and a bounce in your step, because you know you did everything right. Your team hired the right subcontractors; you made sure all of the submittals were approved and materials were bought out early in the schedule; you employed Lean Construction principles and Last Planner® tools to build a cohesive team and collaboratively plan and execute the work. And now, you get to sit back and enjoy the fruits of that planning – a truly fun project, with very few unplanned events. Ahhh....

HONK!!! You almost fall out of your chair. What in the world? You look out the window and see a tractor trailer pulling onto the site. There aren't any deliveries scheduled for right now, and nothing about the truck tells you what material is inside, so your superintendent stops what he's doing to go talk to the driver. It turns out to be the roof curbs for the new air handling equipment. Your superintendent calls the HVAC foreman on the

radio to let him know. The HVAC foreman pulls his crew off of rough-in, so they can unload the materials while your superintendent tries to find a place for the truck to park. The only spot available is toward the back corner of the site. The only crane on site is being used by the window contractor. I guess they'll need to take a break. There's no space on the roof closest to the truck, so you'll need to use a Lull to get the curbs to the other side of the building where the crane will lift them to the roof. The roofers will need to rearrange their laydown to make room for the curbs. Eventually, the curbs will need to be moved out of the roofers' way, and once more to their final locations for installation. Thank goodness everyone gets along and is willing to help out!

Does any of this sound familiar? We in construction management have a few blind spots when it comes to waste on our projects. We work with our subcontractors to put together detailed plans regarding when things need to be done, but we rarely spend a lot of time on the "How." Aside from safety and quality, we tend to consider everything else "Means & Methods," and, therefore none of our business. But, if we're really going to make industry-wide innovations and improvements, we need to look at waste in all of its forms.

The scenario above is all too common on construction projects. One unexpected truck temporarily decimated the productivity of your superintendent, your HVAC crew, your roofing crew, and your window crew. Beyond them, what other trades on site were waiting for that work to be complete to release their next activity? Surely this kind of occurrence affects a project's schedule and budget, right? Of course it does, but we've gotten used to it over the years, so it has become a part of our planning process. Dealing with unplanned deliveries joins the mix

of other wastes that are so common that they've become part of our estimating calculation.

It's important to note that the processes within the manufacturing industry contain about 12% waste, while construction is made up of about 57% waste (2004 Construction Industry Institute study). What are they doing that we don't? First, they look at the whole process, not just what takes place on the assembly lines – Suppliers, logistics, process arrangement, etc. – it's all part of their planning. If you look around the Lean Construction world, new innovations are becoming more common, and that's great, but we need to keep at it. Think about it. With 57% waste, there is a lot of low hanging fruit!

There could be several potential solutions to the issue above. You could identify a dedicated materials management team on site; you could turn away any unplanned deliveries (a dangerous policy if you don't have a reliable delivery management process); you could employ a project logistics management company, such as Stangate Management, Inc. that would work with the project team to identify their needs and develop a comprehensive plan for deliveries throughout construction. (That last one is near and dear to my heart, and sure to be the subject of some upcoming posts.) The point is that there are solutions out there, and it's the project team's job to work together to come up with the solution that works best for their situation. As more and more new opportunities to reduce waste are seized at the project level, the successful innovations will spread through the industry to create a decrease in that 57% I mentioned earlier. The moral of the story: Train yourself to see waste in all of its forms, and keep looking for ways to improve and eliminate waste every single day. What seems like a minor improvement to you could reap significant gains to construction as a whole.

I'm looking forward to talking about innovations that are being, or have been, tried on construction projects around the country and around the world. If you know of any out there that people should hear about, please let me know. I'd love to help spread the word!

Julie Glassmeyer is the Owner of Glassmeyer Construction Consulting & Coaching, LLC (G3C). Julie applies her 21 years of commercial construction management and planning experience to support individuals and organizations in their efforts to reach the next level of performance excellence. G3C, LLC, specializes in Lean Construction, Construction Safety, Leadership Training & Mentoring, Owner Guidance & Mentoring, and Professional Writing. For more information, please visit www.glassmeyerconsulting.com, or contact Julie at julie@glassmeyerconsulting.com or 513.635.2730.

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