ADOPTING THE PARTNERING PROCESS
FOR YOUR HIGHWAY CONSTRUCTION PROJECT

As you prepare for this construction season, is partnering included in your project planning? If it's not, it should be. Contractors have used the partnering process successfully on a wide range of construction projects to improve communication, reduce unnecessary conflict and aid in overall project success. It provides a foundation for mutual success by creating a shared set of objectives to guide the observable behavior of the parties to the contract.

What this means is that the owner, prime contractor and key subcontractors and suppliers all work in advance to better understand the needs of one another and what they can do to avoid creating problems for each other during the project. They normally agree on the shared purpose of the project—the mission statement for the project. They also agree on ways to deal with communication, conflict resolution, submittals, and meetings, for example, to create processes that will support the mission and their primary task of building the project successfully.

Partnering processes are based on sound research and the best practices required for high performance teamwork. Teams require a shared understanding of their mission, goals and objectives, and supportive processes to allow them to achieve these end results. These processes are incredibly important for a project management team where members come from a variety of backgrounds and organizational cultures. Within their companies or organizations, they may have agreed-upon processes for dealing with communication, problem solving and conflict management. But these processes may be very different from one company to the next. That's why the project team needs its own processes, customized for the team members and the particular project.

A general contractor we work with has been in business for over eighty years. In that time, they've only had two claims on state highway projects. This is in large part attributable to the fact that they really believe in and use the partnering process on their jobs to remove the "rocks in the road" that could stand in the way of a smoothly executed project. Leadership sets the tone for the cooperative, collaborative method of working with the state, the subs and suppliers, and leaders 'walk the talk' at this company. With a little time and effort at the front end of the project, the team can set the tone for the entire project. This can result in huge benefits to all of the parties to the contract.

Dom Cingoranelli CMC assists management teams responsible for large, complex projects with partnering, team building and organizational development. He has conducted this work on a variety of projects ranging from $1 million to over $300 million in size. He also has presented training on this process to other consultants at National Conferences conducted by the Institute of Management Consultants.

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