

# Tough Talk About Your Roofing Project

by Graydon Hexham

**Everyone has heard that teamwork is key in obtaining great results on a roofing project. You need a knowledgeable owner, a comprehensive specification, a qualified roofer, appropriate materials, and adequate on-site inspection. Most reasonable people would agree with that statement. Sometimes it even works out that way.**

As long as the project goes smoothly, the impression is that everyone is working from the same side of the table. However, when a job turns sour, the lines are usually quickly drawn and frequently determined more by whose pocket remedies will be pulled from rather than anything else. That's human nature and that's business, albeit a short-term vision.

Let's talk about projects that aren't a complete success. And roofs that look pretty, but beneath the gravel aren't all they were intended to be. Most roofs that do not perform to everyone's expectations fail for a variety of reasons. However, by far, the major causes of a roof failure start before the contractor even arrives at the site - problems that could have been avoided simply by investing in the services of a good, independent roofing consultant.

## **The owner**

The initial flaw starts with the owner. The owner is a businessman, and, like all businessmen, is trying hard to make, and save, money for his organization. Frequently, the decision not to involve an independent roofing consultant is made due to past experience, poor advice or cost considerations. His previous experience may be that he has completed many roofing projects successfully without the use of a consultant or an inspection.

## **Food for thought**

Let's assume that the scope of the project has been determined and is correct. Here are just some of the important questions the owner should ask himself. Does he know a qualified contractor for the scope of this project?

Does he need a specification or will a one or two page quote from the contractor be sufficient? Is there enough protection for him in that quotation or will he rely on withholding the contractor's money or the warranty if there is a problem? What if a problem develops after the roofer has been paid? Are lawyers less expensive than consultants? Does his own time and involvement have a monetary cost attached to it? Based upon his industry knowledge, can he make an informed judgement on the performance on the type of roof he is being offered? Is he willing to pay for sufficient inspection of the work in progress? There have been cases where we were brought in too late to inspect projects. Testing of the roof, our fees, and the cost of remedial action vastly exceeded the costs involved in daily inspection.

## **Cutting corners**

The owner's past experience is no guarantee that the current project will be a success. Even a visual observation of a beautiful looking, completed roof doesn't mean a quality application with a long-term service life. The initial blame for a sour project must lie with the owner, for he is the one ultimately signing the cheques. The shortcuts and the perceived cost savings are large gambles the owner makes that may turn out to be very expensive.

## **The roofer**

If a job turns out poorly, we all know the roofer will get all or most of the blame. There are many great roofers in the marketplace. There are also a large number that make a consultant cringe at the sound of their names. A roofer is in business to make money. If two compatible roofers are bidding a good, tight roofing specification, each has an equal opportunity of winning the bid. However, if a roofer must suggest a system and is competing against No Name Roofing, that roofer may be forced to suggest a system that will best afford them the chance to get the job.

Otherwise, the next roofer through the door may offer a cheaper solution.

Sometimes what is in the best interest of the owner, and will most effectively correct the problem, becomes the second consideration. Now, how does the owner compare apples to oranges? The answer is on price.

Problems do arise during construction, from safety issues to quality of application. Great roofing contractors do not instruct their foremen to make problems or to cut corners, but it happens. Is a bad foreman going to volunteer that he made a mistake? A qualified roofing observer is your best bet to ensure a quality roofing application on site.

### **The manufacturer/distributor**

Mistakes do happen. The wrong product or damaged materials do get shipped to the job site. The products are frequently used for a variety of reasons: the foreman doesn't have a copy of the specification, can't reach the responsible person in his office or the suppliers, time, weather, etc. On the site, materials are often not stored properly and can become wet and damaged. There have been cases where disputes have arisen over damaged rejected materials and/or the method of application where the distributor will support the roofer even against the manufacturer's written instructions. The roofer is the distributor's customer. If a third party didn't catch those deficiencies, they would become part of the roofing system. Would the long-term service life suffer?

### **The warranty**

The warranty is an interesting feature of the roofing project. Somehow this magical piece of paper is going to guarantee the roof won't leak.

Add a can of plastic cement and it may stop a leak! A warranty is primarily a marketing tool. It limits the manufacturer's liability and at the same time manages to make most owners feel warm and cozy about their new roof.

### **The consultant**

The consultant is, and should be, the owner's real warranty that he will receive what he is paying for. The consultant is the roofing expert who will oversee the project from developing the specification through to the final deficiency inspection. Most of the problems discussed in the above sections would be avoided with the use of a qualified roofing consultant. Make sure that you select a consultant who is capable of performing the work you require. Interview them, check their qualifications and references. Be comfortable with their personnel. Be aware of two major mistakes that owners make when selecting a consultant.

1. While you may love the salesperson you deal with, he likely will not be the person sent to the site. Make sure you know the qualifications of the people that will perform the services.

2. Don't make your decision just on initial price. Ask questions regarding the level of service and personnel. If you are quoted percentage pricing, you must understand how that pricing is calculated.

A consultant who charges eight percent of a \$10 per sq. ft. roof is more expensive than a consultant who charges ten percent of a \$6 sq. ft. roof. Will there be additional charges, travel costs and/or other disbursements?

Bottom line - the equation never changes!

A knowledgeable owner

+ a comprehensive specification

+ a qualified contractor

+ appropriate materials

+ adequate on site inspection

= one high quality roofing application

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