

Specifying common sense

Recently, NTCA Five Star Contractor Fox Ceramic Tile, Inc., of St. Marys, Kan., was awarded the contract for a massive Scheels All Sports project in Overland Park, Kan. R.L. Engebretson Architects of Fargo, N.D., was the architect of record for the project.

The specification document contained a very unusual section, entitled “Common Sense.”

Kyle Maichel, project estimator for Fox Ceramic Tile, said, “As you can imagine when I first read the spec, I was amused. I printed it off and passed it around the office, we all



had a good chuckle.

“But when you think about it, this is really a fairly significant specification,” he continued. “The way I see it the author was telling everyone where he stood. He wanted a quality product, installed by quality craftsmen, without the excuses that can plague a project when common sense is not utilized.”

Here is the spec:

SECTION 01 0001 COMMON SENSE

GENERAL

RELATED DOCUMENTS

Drawings and general Provisions of the Contract, including General Conditions and other Division 00 & 01 Specification Sections, apply to this Section.

DEFINITIONS

Common: Belonging to or shared by, affecting or serving, all the members of a class or society, considered together;

Sense: A faculty, possessed by humans, of perceiving external objects by means of impressions made upon certain organs of the body.

Common Sense: A supposed sense which has held to be common bond of all others; Sound judgment.

Brain: The organ or seat of intellect used for thinking and solving problems, located between two ears and within the individual’s head attached at the shoulders. For best results it must be engaged (active) during all times. Do not confuse this organ with any other organ which may cause poor choices under certain circumstances.

REQUIREMENT INCLUDED

- Experience in area of work.
- Demonstrate they have successfully done this type of work at least 2 years prior to the start of this project.
- Demonstrate they have been trained by someone who knows what they are doing.

Performance required during bidding.

- Actually read all of Divisions 00 & 01 prior to reading the technical specifications covering their specific work and reviewing the drawings.
- Notify in a timely manner to the Architect/Engineer any errors, discrepancies, mistakes or other items which will impair or prevent achieving the final design requirements of the Project.
- Submit an equal or greater than product for prior approval.

Performance required during construction.

- Reread all of Division 00 & 01 and review the drawings prior to submittal of shop drawings and start of construction.
- Submit shop drawings, product data and other information required to accurately portray the performance of the product in accordance with the Contract Documents.
- Notify Prime Contractor if any work prior to your work being installed is not at a quality standard to receive your Work.
- Follow the directions of the Prime Contractor.
- Complete the Work in a prescribed manner and time frame to achieve the desired results required by the Contract Documents.

Job Site Safety.

- Notify the Prime Contractor of any unsafe conditions.
- Follow the manufacturer's operational manual for any operation of equipment or installation of product.
- Do not drink or consume any matter labeled unsafe or mind altering.

Reference Standards.

- All common standards, laws and protocols which represent quality and are outside the boundaries of stupidity.

DOCUMENTATION REQUIRED PRIOR TO CONSTRUCTION START

- The following must be documented by the Prime Contractor to the Architect that prior to proceeding with the Work they have contracted with sub-contractors and suppliers that they possess the ability to:
 - read, comprehend and speak the English language
 - understand that their contractual obligation to perform the Work is governed by both the Project Manual and Drawings;
 - understand the difference between the right way and the wrong way;
 - know that it costs more to do it twice than do it right the first time;
 - under promise and over deliver;

PART 2 - PRODUCTS

- HUMAN BRAIN

- Typically provided at Birth.

PART 3 - EXECUTION

- ACTIVATION

- Initiate prior to performing Work each day.

END OF SECTION

The author of Section 01 0001 is Rick Engebretson, AIA, president and CEO of The RLE Group of which R.L. Engebretson Architects is a part. He inserted this section into all his company's specifications starting around May 2013.

"I've been in this business since 1969, and the quality of workmanship has gone down a lot," Engebretson said. "A lot of it has to do with the lack of people thinking common sense. When I hear, 'I've always done it this way', or 'This isn't my first rodeo,' immediately I am suspect, since they've been doing it wrong the last 30 years."

The Common Sense section is an effort to get contractors and subcontractors to wake up, he said. "Read the spec and know what it says, and read the instructions. I was trying to be humorous and at the same time – this is the contract and you need to do it correctly. If it's not perfect, read it and tell me what doesn't work; don't go ahead and do what you have always done."

Engebretson tells a story about an issue on a Rapid City, S.D., job where cultured marble was continually falling off the wall.

"We finally went in and specified a LATICRETE product," Engebretson said, but the construction manager superintendent and mason still complained. "This stuff doesn't work. It's too runny," they said. When they declared, "This product is no good – this isn't our first rodeo," red flags went up for Engebretson, who

asked then how much water they were adding to the 60-lb bag. It turned out to be three to four times the amount of water needed for the LATICRETE product! The mortar was being mixed at the same ratios as standard mortar, without even a look at the instructions.

Because even with the Common Sense section, Engebretson finds contractors, foremen and supervisor aren't reading the spec, the firm has instituted a pre-installation conference for every Scheels project.

"Two to three weeks out, we meet with the general contractor and subcontractor installer/foreman in a phone conference or in person, and we go through the specs and make sure they are understanding the specifications," he said.

Fox Ceramic Tile's Maichel explained that the architectural firm itself exercised common sense in the bidding process." They did not simply accept the low bid and move on the next spec section," Maichel said. "We were asked to provide some information about Fox Ceramic Tile. The architect wanted to see past projects, current projects, and future



You're welcome Jim!



"We tore out 500 sq. ft. of porcelain tile thinsetted over 1/4" backer board. My crew ground 500 sq. ft. of thinset down to the original surface of backer board and did not have to change the filter once but we did have to empty the 5 gal. bucket that the Dust Deputy was attached to several times. The dust that was not contained was extremely minimal. This really impressed my homeowners. Since that day, I have lent out my Dust Deputy several times to fellow tradesmen and they were extremely pleased with the performance and simplicity of your device. So thanks a lot for producing such an awesome product."

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projects. They wanted to see who we work for on a regular basis, and their opinions of us, as well as the opinions of our major distributors.

"The owners / architects were exercising their common sense, by truly interviewing us, rather than simply accepting the low number," Maichel added. "They were searching for the 'right number.' As a subcontractor, we really appreciate this approach. It is easy to be the low number. We could be the low number on every project, if that was our objective. But Fox Ceramic Tile did not achieve NTCA Five Star Contractor status by being the low bidder. We strive to have the right number. And common sense dictates that will not always be the low number. We would much rather be weighed and measured against quality competition than simply the lowest bidders."

Cultivating common sense – and following industry standards – are just a couple of the reasons that the tile industry is emphasizing ongoing education and training, certification of tile installers through the CTEF or the advanced certifications of the ACT program. That's why the industry is encouraging A&D professionals to specify qualified labor on their jobs. Because the truth is that common sense isn't very common and projects suffer as a result.

For information about upcoming CTEF Certified Tile Installer exams, visit www.tilecareer.com; for ACT certifications, visit www.tilecertifications.com.