

Foreword by Robert Jackson

# WINNING!

Success in the  
Construction Industry



RICHARD A. REESE

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*Written Words Publishing LLC*

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Listening and learning from others are essential ingredients of success. This book reflects the lessons I have learned over so many years and those with whom I have been associated. Many ideas deemed useful and beneficial for you are interwoven within the fabric of this book's recommendations. Great appreciation is expressed, and respect acknowledged, for those named and unnamed contributors.

I also express heartfelt thanks to my wife, Bette, our daughter, Sheryl, son-in-law, Paul, and daughter, Julie G., for their technical assistance, and to my civil engineer friend, Andy Romance, who provided early input.

# FOREWORD



When Richard “Dick” Reese asked me to write a foreword for his book *Winning: Success in the Construction Industry*, I was honored, surprised and apprehensive. We have known each other for a long time and have discovered over countless conversations that we have many common experiences and values.

Nobody can tell a story better than a practitioner. Dick has “been there/done that” in the field of construction. *Winning: Success in the Construction Industry* is a compilation of decades of project experience as an owner, contractor and program manager. Anyone who is in the field has had successes and failures. Dick guides us through techniques to complete any project on time and on budget.

After my initial surprise at being asked, I realized he asked partly because, like him, I am an engineer having graduated from the University of Nevada, Reno with a degree in Civil Engineering. My background includes work in both the public and private sector, as well as

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being the owner representative on several projects for over 50 years. I have also served four terms as Mayor of a mid-sized Arizona community, giving me a unique viewpoint on what makes a successful project.

Dick has talked for a long time about writing a book to help all project team members work together to complete projects successfully. This book's primary theme is the need for communication among all involved. Everyone has their own needs within a project. So many failed projects have poor communication resulting in team members having different agendas. The key is to make sure the owner ultimately gets the product they expected, the contractor makes a profit and the architect/engineer is satisfied that the end result/product is safe and represents their design.

Too many projects get off track at some point and the team forgets they are all responsible for completing it on time and on budget. *Winning: Success in the Construction Industry* will provide you with a summary of 50 years of experience that will help in the ultimate goal of a successful project.

This is a quick and easy read with lots of valuable tips. Read, enjoy and practice!

*Written by Robert Jackson, Mayor (retired)*

# INTRODUCTION



Those who fall under any of the following categories will find this tool useful:

- Architects
- Design Engineers
- General Contractors
- Subcontractors
- Public and Private Sector Owners
- Specialty Consultants
- Developers
- Entrepreneurs
- Project Managers
- Program Managers
- Construction Managers
- Lenders
- Venture Capitalists
- Land Use Attorneys
- Elected Officials
- Municipal Department Heads
- Citizen Stakeholders and those who have fulfilled successful careers and now fondly reminiscing with lightheartedness.

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I, Richard A. Reese, worked on writing this book for quite some time, handwriting notes about WINNING IN THE CONSTRUCTION BUSINESS, building long-term relationships with repeat clients. Of course, I've continuously reminded myself that a book must be written to benefit others, not myself. I don't want to release a book and, at the end of the day, be the only one who possesses it, having a garage full to satisfy my ego trip.

So, suspecting the any/all thoughts, ideas, postulates have been conceived and probably published before, I've tried to find anything that speaks, with clarity and succinct expression, to the concept of winning. I found there is nothing and, in further support of that conclusion, read something published by someone smarter than I am. I concluded that the construction industry ranks dead last in communication skills.

When you are in the business of real estate development or you are a planner, owner, architect, engineer, subcontractor, general contractor, or supplier, you are an important player in the efforts "to convert dreams into income streams." You start each day intending to serve or earn profit from making a quantifiably important professional contribution to a project's bottom-line success.

Me? I've been where you are, in more than a few of those roles, and at this point in my life

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want to offer help with insight, direction, inspiration, and encouragement. I aim to provide thoughts you can use to move faster and more profitably toward your goals.

So, how do I do that with this book? How can I best serve you? How can your time be invested, not wasted? Answer: Each page must represent a rung in a success ladder for you. Thoughts shared must be either very important reminders of how to or be new input, directions and strategies for you to use quickly.

So, here we go!

# CHAPTER ONE

## PREPARATION



It takes planning, attitude, relationships, and commitment to complete a successful project on time and on budget. Let's examine each of these areas.

### Planning

We've all heard, "Failing to plan is planning to fail." So:

- ❖ Write your plan down.
- ❖ Be brief, reasonable, strategically creative, and focused.
- ❖ Whether talking about a Business Plan for your company or a plan to win a specific job, think about the basics.

Distill the fundamentals in an outline, no matter what business you're in or the nature of

the job you are competing to win. Be sure to address administration, operations, marketing, and finance similar to the following:

Administration: We are a lean, efficient team. We rank lowest in our industry in terms of operating overhead, enhancing our ability to compete and WIN without laying a burden on the client to pay for more than needed to exceed expectations.

Operations: We pledge the team members who are best suited to each job. The experience of our people matches or exceeds the performance demands of the client.

Marketing: Our brochures, data sheets, sales aids, and proposals are succinct—no fluff—truthful portrayals of relevant company and project team qualifications. We pursue client relationships that enable us to excel in our performance. We tailor and focus our marketing efforts—from cold calling to winning repeat client relations—on earning professional respect and the privilege of long-term relationships.

Finance: Our financial strength, measured by full disclosure and bank to bank communications, bonding capacity, and industry organization rankings, is open to client scrutiny. Our mission is exceptional service and performance, and financial stability is key. Paying our bills on time, earning the respect of our suppliers, translate to starting a job on time, completing it

on schedule and earning the privilege of serving again.

## **Attitude**

Attitude toward winning can be critical to short and long-term success in pursuing a given client, a project or building a business! Work with me on this: I'm not suggesting you chase everything, or ignore realisms, or betray your firm's mission statement, or your principal's direction. I'm just reminding you that the right attitude, the winning one, can be a driver. Someone said: "Success comes in cans, not cannots!"

## **Relationships**

Remember when statutes that governed how publicly funded projects must be awarded "to the lowest responsible bidder?" And, to the General Contractor, that meant licensed and bondable; not a prohibitable hill to climb. Well, while statute authors may have been well meaning, meeting those criteria was so often not a challenge, so the Owner would contract with the lowest monetary bidder, perhaps including 'Joe Jackleg' who left something out of his bid, ready to lay a change order on the Owner before the ink was even dry on his contract!

So now, after generations of disputes, litigation, and mediation, statutes were changed to allow for professional qualifications to govern, i.e., relevant project experience, references, financial strength, and individual experience, leading to elimination of cost overruns, adversarial disputes, etc. What soon followed were contracting method shifts, bringing the General around the table, so to speak, for a fee, to help control costs and time during design, helping the architect to distill out change order risks, ‘drawing the lines’ once, etc., i.e., ‘negotiated’ form of contract, now called Construction Manager at Risk (CMAR). So, you, the reader, recognize that the Owner wants to trust his project team members as fiduciaries, acknowledging value of sincere efforts to apply respective skills to each individual team member and Owner benefit.

## **Commitment**

I read an article recently, written by a successful businessman I admire, in which he quoted the old saying, “It’s not what you know that counts, it’s who you know.” I say NOT QUITE; it’s not who you know that counts, it’s who you GET to know that counts.

We’ve all known name droppers. Question: how many times has that person whose name you dropped called you? In your gut, in your

quiet time, as you cite and rank the names of the prospective clients most important to you, how well do you really know them? Certainly, you can identify the prospects most in common with your core competencies as professionals. You are able to name the top 12 prospective clients in the market you are best able to serve. So, what's left?

How about using the Pareto Principle: 'Concentrate on the vital few and eliminate the trivial many.' Or how about applying the 80/20 rule: 80% of the business—regardless of the business you're in—is commonly done by 20% of the people. So, focus on the 20%, always consistent with honest definition of professional abilities to serve them, performing better than anyone else.

Okay, now that we agree on making a commitment to plan, focus and the importance of relationships, prioritizing them, and investing in building them via hunting with a rifle vs. flock shooting, what's left to be stressed? Let's examine empathy, exceptionalism and target markets.

## **Empathy**

At every level of prospective client interface, your people must put themselves in the viewers', the listeners' heads. Not being stupid, obnoxious or unethical; simply planning marketing efforts

around how you would want to be sold, if the situation were reversed.

## **Exceptionalism**

Really, who are you? What are the ‘Points of Difference’: you, your local office, your company, compared to your competition? Look in the mirror, define and rank the strengths you represent in the world of your clients.

## **Target Markets**

“Go where the business is, not where it ain’t,” someone said. You have limited time and money to invest in building your business; it is hugely important that you DEFINE your target markets, right to the individual prospects, and marry that definition with an objective analysis of your core competencies. Then focus, not flock shoot, on that 20%.

## **Business Building Strategies**

Now, let’s think outside the box. Are there different strategies to build a business that do not require inordinate or extra cost? The answer is yes. It can be accomplished by taking the following actions:

- ❖ Join or form a ‘Tip Club,’ a group of non-competing people who meet, say weekly or twice a month, to share ‘what’s new’ and how

to help one another. Trust me, such an activity led to much new business. Key is identifying people who are in senior positions or are on their way to more influential responsibilities in the business community. Ideal participants are bankers, attorneys, financial advisors, and others in the construction industry with whom you do not compete, etc.

- ❖ Build relationships with ‘economic development’ staff members who work for cities, towns, states, and even federal government, people responsible for bringing new business to their communities. This extends to elected officials who serve in the areas of growth which you have identified in your business plan.
- ❖ Create a project. Rather than relying so much on subscription lead sheets, the ‘Dodge Report,’ etc., collaborate with other, non-competing and complimentary professionals to consider ways/means for answering capital improvement needs in areas of growth. Best, current example I can think of may be “P3” (Public Private Partnership)—forming a select team of architects, engineers, a professional public sector financial advisor, and a developer to propose a private sector response to a capital program need (i.e., transportation, water treatment, health care).

So true is it that commonly public sector staffers do not have funds for capital projects; ‘public works’ is the department most often burdened with providing facilities and services without adequate funds. City managers wring their hands, trying to convince city councils to appropriate money; public push-back (“we don’t need bigger government;” “we can get along,” etc., etc.) presents another roadblock. Formerly called ‘Privatization,’ starting in the 90’s, the term Public Private Partnership or ‘P3’ was adopted, wherein the private sector team member brings their money to the need in partnership with government. The U.S. is way behind the UK and Canada, but we’re catching up. Infrastructure needs are everywhere and it is the thoughtful architect, general contractor, etc., who learns of a capital need and seeks investors to team, ideally in unsolicited proposals, to form P3’s! One more strategy in this regard: contact the Council for Public Private Partnerships in Washington D.C. to learn more!

- ❖ Consider shifting a portion of the existing internal staff from traditional approaches to providing services as a General Contractor. For example, embark on serving public and private sector prospects as the Program Manager or Owner Representative. Often,

the public sector Owner is short-staffed and prohibited by a Board of Supervisors or Council from hiring more people.

While it is true that you would close out the opportunity to be the General Contractor on a given project, consider what may be a way to capture new revenues from a much lower risk contract. (Yours truly did just that by forming a subsidiary company and building a large Program Management business).

## **Self-Improvement Strategies**

Recognizing that teams of any number of people must consist of individuals who are dedicated to growing in the business via constant learning and a commitment to improving their skills, personal and professional. If you need reminders to accept that premise, here are a couple:

- ❖ A famous football coach said, “Show me a good loser and I’ll show you a loser.”
- ❖ “It’s not how much it’s worth that counts, it’s how much someone thinks it’s worth.” (So, consider your worth to the company, the team, etc., and how you and your contribution need to be perceived.)