

A hand is shown writing in a spiral-bound notebook on a desk. In the background, there is a laptop and a calculator. The scene is lit with a warm, golden light.

You Want What by When? And Other Scheduling Challenges

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The fast food industry has created an entire philosophy of producing fast and inexpensive meals. While this concept is great when you are hungry and in a rush, it has heightened expectations in the public to the point they believe everything can be produced within a fast food time frame. This is not true. Expectations need to be managed and processes need to be explained properly in order to educate customers.

Facility planning projects encounter these challenges in a variety of ways. Take, for example, a new conference room: How long would it take to set one up? Seems like an easy question. All one needs is a table and some chairs, right? Well, no.

The first question to ask is: 'Can the existing space accommodate a conference room?' If not, there may need to be demolition, construction, and audio/visual coordination; not to mention the need for building permits and time to order new furniture. Based on this one need (furniture), there are six possible vendors who should get involved immediately: interiors firm, contractor, audio-visual firm, furniture dealership, movers, and installers. All of these trades need to be managed and scheduled accordingly.

Establishing a project schedule involves listing activities, milestones and deliverables each with a start and finish date. Typically when initiating any project, good practice is to start with a kick-off meeting using an interiors firm to develop the scope of work and requirements for the room. The requirements identified in this meeting will help to determine the schedule, budget, and complexity of the work to be done. The interiors firm helps to educate the customer on time frame, costs, and scheduling requirements such as, access to elevators and long lead items. Should anticipated time frames be unacceptable, there is always the option to expedite a project, but typically at a cost. Construction costs can go up as overtime requirements, project phasing, and unforeseen conditions become exposed (such as delayed access to other floors for core drilling electrical locations).

As the project proceeds and construction commences, it becomes important to hold weekly meetings to review the schedule for the coordination of vendors and to discuss potential obstacles to a job. While the process can be time consuming, the interiors firm should hold weekly meetings on the same day and time sets an expectation for both the contractors and customers.

Meeting notes should be generated by the interiors firm after each meeting to inform all vendors and team members about issues that may arise in order to prevent delays. The schedule should be updated regularly and shared with the customer to improve communication for customer service and satisfaction.

Scheduling also offers the ability to track costs and measure actual performance. Submitting weekly updates can help improve labor efficiency so vendors know when they may be required to add extra help in order to meet their deadline. These updates also help track what was promised by exact dates, so that the customer is aware of the progress.

In conclusion, facility managers don't have to tackle these challenges alone. There are various scheduling software packages on the market that when used properly can support project management requirements and prove helpful to keep projects on track.

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