



APRIL 1996

Relationships

In this place every month I have shared my thoughts on the importance of the working relationship between the product representative and the specifier. These thoughts are not simply wishful musings by a CSI chapter president but a sincere sharing of successful techniques I use every day to raise the quality of my specification deliverable and to use my fee dollars more efficiently.

Every aspect of this relationship that I profiled has been tried, tested, and confirmed by me during the course of my work as a specifier. The investment of time and effort developing and maintaining productive successful working relationships with product representatives is well worth my valuable time and energy.

This ongoing relationship allows me and the representative time to understand in detail the product application to the particular building type of the design firm, and allows the manufacturer of the product to commit resources to best serve the specifier on a long term basis. Not all of the product representatives I interact with have this status nor do all of the products that I am responsible for specifying warrant that kind of time and effort. There are a handful of critical elements and systems that do warrant this kind of relationship to manage the design firm's risk of building design failures and program defects. I refer to these representatives as rep/consultants. These rep/consultants are my partners in the design specifying process.

Previous articles have described the honesty, integrity, and credibility of partners necessary for a productive relationship. Those articles also described the reasonable expectations of both from the other.

As a specifier I have detailed the expectations of the product representative's service. But any successful relationship is a two way street. It is important for the specifiers to know what can be reasonably expected of them in return for valued services rendered by the product representative. Both representative and specifier must have knowledge of the others business and the role they play in the building enterprise to discuss confidently and freely about what are reasonable expectations. For the specifier to expect timely, accurate, and project specific product solutions from the representative without giving something in return is unreasonable. What is the "pay off" for the representative? What can they reasonably expect from the specifier? Obviously the peculiar circumstances of the



project, specifier, and representative will determine the pay off for both the representative and the specifier.

For me the minimum reasonable expectations are that I will understand the representative's product, the industry they compete in, and the specification recommendations that are made for the project. That I will be fair with substitutions, and submittals. More importantly for the representative I will provide the representative with early on project information to help the manufacturer be competitive at bid time. Providing information about the project and procurement process to the manufacturer to align itself in the marketplace and plan the best strategy at bid time can be expected. This is one of the benefits for the manufacturer who supports its sales representatives who work hard to become a respected rep/consultant.

Developing and maintaining successful working relationships with product representatives is one of the most satisfying aspects of my practice.

CSI supports my efforts at raising the standard of the product representative and specifier. Take advantage of all that CSI has to offer. Your business can use it.

I have enjoyed writing down my thoughts each month about what I believe and practice each day. Next month's issue will be my last as president of the chapter. I will devote the article to profiling the successes of the chapter during my term. Many chapter members have volunteered considerable time and effort to continuing the traditions of the chapter and investing in themselves and the industry.