

AN INTERVIEW WITH THE GRAY DESIGN BUILDING PROJECT MANAGER

Joseph Cox

With more than 20 years of experience in the industry, Ben Noble, of Turner Construction, acts as the Project Manager (PM) for the Gray Design Building at U.K.. For a project of this size, Noble spends each day on site overseeing the finances, communications, and functions of the construction's trade partners and workers.

Although familiar with construction throughout his life, Noble didn't necessarily approach a degree in finance at U.K. with the intention of becoming a PM. He recalled being influenced by the successful doctors and lawyers in his life who no longer practiced in the conventional fashion, but had essentially all become businessmen with respective lenses. This placed emphasis on the importance of understanding money, a skill that becomes universal to every field.

This allowed Noble's degree to remain applicable when the familiarity of old colleagues returned him to construction at a Lexington local contractor where he stayed for 12-14 years before joining Turner Constructions. From entry level, becoming a PM depends mostly on the size of a project and the volume of the company. Noble suggested that a professional could become a PM within a couple years of graduation, if the company was independent and small. A role like this could organize a couple \$100,000 dollars, but larger and more complex companies could have projects with budgets up to \$50 million.

Yet, as a PM, this comfortability with money is vital as they are expected to understand the holding cost, overhead and profit, change orders, budgetary items, finances, staff, and costs. They must then not only communicate all of this to the owner, but remain in active conversation

with designers, electrical engineers, structural engineers, contractors, and every other discipline that contributes to the construction of the project.

It is important for the PM to become included by the schematic stage of the design process because of their financial guidance towards what the budget could support. Noble stressed that their role at the table is not to influence the design, but only to educate on the cost and feasible means of the project. He said a good PM is able to see the design and have an understanding of costs that can keep the design stay in line when needed. For a more accurate estimate, a PM will reach out to contractors for pricing as well. In addition, they must also convey the limitations that may arise when unexpected existing site conditions require a redistribution of funds.

This occurred in the Gray Design Building with the discovery that the fire suppression system routed through the structure also supported that of the adjacent building. Workers had to modify and rework the routing in order to keep the system active, while simultaneously adding new footers and foundation in the same location. While the design objectives were able to remain the same, the PM was tasked with orchestrating the changes to costs and schedules.

Found conditions on renovation projects are inevitable, Noble confirmed. Being organized and familiar with your skills is how you adjust accordingly to move forward. As an education building affiliated with U.K., there are higher standards to comply with, but after eight years of building with the university, Noble no longer is phased by them. As the PM, he spends each day in the hub of the site trailer, and manages the productivity of the 21 trade partners and over 80 workers that arrive on-site each day. Half of his job is numbers and he maintains an approach to the field of design that is highly technical. Anyone else can design the project, he assured, a PM will just ensure it is executed correctly.