

Top 5 Uh-Oh Signs of a Client

Executive Summary: If you do not have a relationship with a client, or you are moving to a different management team within a familiar client, there can be some telltale warning signs. Listen to your client for some of the items listed below and beware.

#5 The taped meeting. I haven't been to many of these, but when an owner tapes the meeting, be it audio or visual, there's only one reason for that. And that reason is litigation preparation. He's expecting you to sue him, or he's wanting support for his pursuit of you.



#4 "Just follow the plans." This answer comes verbally or in writing via letter or RFI. More times than not in today's world, the plans and specifications were rushed and never really completed. Instead of working out issues as they come, many clients will tell you to simply follow the Contract Documents as ambiguous as they may be. This is the sign of an unfair client wanting you to take all the risk.

#3 No direct contact with the Engineer/Architect. Often times matters can be resolved in a quick two-minute discussion with the design professional. When an owner or client will not allow this, it protracts the issue unnecessarily. An efficient owner – an owner which cares about project cost and schedule – will allow the contractor to talk to the Engineer and follow up the conversation in writing.

#2 "We'll make it up on the next job." This one's the classic, right? So, you know the play – the owner wants you to suck it up on this issue in exchange for a favorable decision towards you on the next job. If it ever even comes.

#1 "I want you to make money." I've heard this in countless first encounters and pre-construction meetings. And without fail, there's a time where this is blatantly contradicted.

My story. I love those five above. Especially #1 – I just chuckle when I hear it in practice. Some others from my personal anecdote file include:

- "This'd be a lot easier to talk about if you were done." I had two hours in my estimate to drop a precast vault into a dewatered excavation. But, in this case, the hole was half full of water. The client didn't have the site dewatering permit, so we had nowhere to discharge the water. I wanted the additional time and cost impact for working in the wet handled before we finished the work under this changed condition. After some heated discussion, the superintendent said that it'd be a lot easier to talk about more money if the vault was set. We set the vault, and it didn't work out too well for me. It was my mistake for trusting him.
- "We'll take care of you at the end." This is a bait 'n switch tactic. The promise you receive today to be taken care of at the end of the job is the bait, and then the switch becomes the fact that the promiser has left the company or just the project. This is not always by chance some clients use this as a standard job closing procedure.