

## Partner, But Not Necessarily Via Partnering

**Executive Summary.** Partnering was created decades ago to bring the Contractor and Owner together in a semi-formal setting to align goals. Partnering session(s) can be effective, but so can a beer and a burger.

**Roots of partnering.** The Construction Industry Institute defines the purpose of Contractor/Owner partnering as the two parties coming together “to achieve specific business objectives by maximizing the effectiveness of each participant’s resources.” I’m not certain the CII birthed the partnering concept, but some have given credit to them for it.

**What is partnering?** Many construction contracts, especially bigger ones, require that the parties participate in partnering. It is an event at the beginning of the project (sometimes also recurring events at, say, six month intervals) that occurs at a neutral location. Food is usually present as the sessions can last a half day or even a couple days.

It is led by a neutral party whose soul goal is to get the parties aligned on common goals and maybe even get them to like each other. Some examples of what happens at these events include the parties being asked to name challenges on the project, to set goals on the project, and to agree on best and most efficient methods of communication. So, the parties may agree to return RFIs in 7 days, or to call on the phone before sending an email, or to agree to resolve all issues on the job (if at all possible).

**Too fluffy?** Those that do not support the concept of partnering say that it’s too hokey, or fluffy, or superficial. That it’s not binding. Others say that people who come into these sessions change their personality for the day, and return to life as usual outside of the event.

**My story.** Over the years I’ve participated in partnering. I think it’s a great idea of one party (or ideally both parties) feels strongly that it will be beneficial. Throwing it in the specification because it sounds cool or is politically correct is a waste of time and money.



What I find most useful in these sessions is the opportunity to meet with people you wouldn't normally see. For instance, seeing face-to-face the engineer of record or the submittal reviewer was a great benefit to me when creating RFIs and submittals as a project engineer. The writer and reviewer are both human and sometimes putting a face and personality and body language together with a name can make a big difference.



I named the article in a way that likely will upset our partnering facilitators, and I said above that a beer and burger would do just as good as this choreographed partnering because the overall goal here is to get the parties friendly with each other. If the Owner likes the Contractor and the Contractor likes the Owner, the Project benefits. It's just that simple. And if this can be accomplished via a partnering session, great. But, if a series of beer and burger outings does the same thing, do that!

Work safe!