

Is It Time for You to Start Kedging?

BY GARRETT J. SULLIVAN

“Kedging” is a nautical maneuver that helps large ships navigate in and out of tight harbors and inlets. To carry it out, a small boat is maneuvered several hundred feet away from a ship and a kedge anchor is dropped in the direction the ship should move. The crew then pulls the anchor in, putting the vessel back on course. It’s a slow but necessary process that gets you out of difficult or stagnant positions.

This is similar to the steps you must take when you want to change your construction company’s direction. Once you recognize that you’re stuck, how can you to start kedging to help move forward?

Here are five situations contractors often “get stuck” in and how to carefully maneuver toward better circumstances.

Employee Evaluations

People and culture are the primary motivators for Generation X and Y employees, with salary trailing a distant fourth in importance. Maintaining your organization’s culture requires constant monitoring—which is why staff evaluations are such a useful tool.

Consistent employee feedback should be the responsibility of a company’s leaders, not just its HR department. The easiest solution is to develop a “push method” of evaluation: 20-minute, bimonthly meetings in which the employee provides an opinion and you provide verbal feedback. Both parties take notes during the evaluation in preparation for the next session. This methodology results in 24 opportunities per year to provide assessment. (For a sample evaluation form, visit www.SullivanHi.com.)

Systems and Procedures

Your company’s systems and procedures should be a roadmap of best practices. Consider forming working groups or committees to spread information throughout the organization. Scheduling a bimonthly meeting between senior project managers, superintendents and younger engineers can be a great way to broach topics such as change order management or safety procedures at jobsites. Remember, Gen X and Y were raised working in groups, which makes this the most effective approach to transferring knowledge.

Also take the opportunity to review your systems and procedures manual. Update it by cutting out words and adding graphics. In this age of digital content and social media, images provide strong impact.

Enterprise Software

Does your company operate with fully integrated accounting and construction management software, or a hodgepodge of Excel sheets and Word documents? If the latter, look into some of the comprehensive, reasonably priced software on the market today. These programs are user-friendly and dramatically increase efficiency. The cost of implementing new software will often be significantly less than the drain on your current personnel resources. Employees will thank you for the change.

Go Paperless

No contractor today could go entirely paperless; however, heading in that direction will make your business much more efficient. Most major construction enterprise software contains

a scanning feature, but there are other inexpensive ways to eliminate paper as well. Instead of printing out all of your documents, save them as PDF files instead. Remember that it may become more difficult to find digitized documents if you don’t name and file them in an organized manner.

Get on the Cloud

Everyone is slowly, but surely, moving to “the cloud”—and you should start this process if you haven’t already. The cloud facilitates access to your files when you’re away from the office. Freeing up your server also saves money and results in less down time. While there are numerous ways to get on the cloud, two cheap and simple options are www.dropbox.com and www.box.com. These are free, and the more users you refer the more file space you are allotted. At any time you can upgrade to their paid business-level solutions, which include extra features.

Between now and the end of the year, why not challenge yourself to implementing one of the above solutions each month? If you kedge your business and stick to it, you’ll begin 2015 as a much leaner operation. Have the foresight to navigate your business out of its more precarious position and into the open ocean, where smoother sailing will be ahead of you. 🏠



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