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So you have contracted work for your plant, what issues might you now encounter? "But wait," you are saying, "I thought if I contracted services, everything would be rosy." Well, it may be better, but as long as you are dealing with human beings, you are dealing with potential problems. Here are some that come to mind that we will discuss further:

- Coordination
- Schedule
- Cost
- Design/scope changes
- Billing
- Work abilities
- Default

Coordination

Just as you have to coordinate your own workers, you will have to coordinate contractors. Whether it is as simple as the cleaning service waiting until the office staff leaves, or as complicated as scheduling an installation of a new cooling system in an area loaded with temperature sensitive equipment, all the various factors need to be considered before acting. How do you determine those factors? You can take a lesson from journalism and ask: who, what, where, when, why, and how?

Who on the owner's side will be affected, directly or indirectly, by anything that you do? If you adjust the temperature in the equipment room, what equipment will be affected? If you have to shut down equipment, what other operations will be affected? Where will the contractor be staging and working, will accessibility be an issue? Can the contractor get to the equipment without moving or modifying existing structures? When will the work be started, and when will it be complete? Why are you doing this? Why are you doing this now? Why are you doing this to me? Why, why, why? And finally, how will the work be done so as to have the least disruption, least cost, least problems?

Keeping in mind that most operations start a domino effect, where one thing leads to another, work needs to be closely planned. So how is all of this planning done? As many of these restraints as can be identified need to be specified in the contract so that there are fewer surprises. This may involve many coordination meetings, which should involve as may of the “players” as possible, including the end users.

This may not be totally on topic, but let me repeat a couple of examples of why it is important to
include the end users. I was working on a hospital project in Spartanburg, South Carolina. We were renovating a wing of a hospital that included demolition, reconstruction and interior finishes. When the project was within a week of being completed, the head nurse who would be in charge of the wing came on a tour of the renovation. She looked at the new carpet and said, “I don’t like it, replace it.” The hospital vice-president directed us to change the carpet, luckily delaying the project only four weeks.

The second example was on another project in the infamous Kellogg Cereal plant. Kellogg was building a brand new building with cereal production facilities and a price tag close to $100 million. After months of design meetings with engineers from Kellogg and Daniel International (Fluor Daniel), the engineer/construction manager, the project was under construction. When one of the “lines” was installed, with most of the equipment and associated support, the crew who was going to be working there decided that they did not like the layout. They suggested that equipment be moved along with a half-dozen other adjustments. That started a series of design changes and expensive change orders to several contractors.

These two examples show how important it is to get the end users involved in the project as early as possible. Neither the head nurse nor Kellogg’s production people were involved in the design, and their decisions cost the owners time and money. Never underestimate the stroke of the end users.

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