

THE PM EDITION

Each one cost somebody a project, a client, or a career. Each card carries what it cost, the exact words of the person who paid it, and the move to make next time. Grouped by the situation you are in, not by theme.

01 / THE PAPER TRAIL • BEFORE YOU HIT SEND

01

SUPERS

PMS

EP 045

Every email you send is a potential Exhibit 12. State facts, never opinions or conclusions.

Garrett Mott, a construction trial lawyer at Hennigh Law, tried a case where a PM of about 25 or 26 had sent five emails, probably dashed off at the end of long days, asking things like whether the team was still using the bad stuff. Those five emails became Exhibit 12 in the trial, and when Stephen asked what they cost, Mott put the number at about 30 million dollars. He has watched the same pattern decide other cases, including a subsidence claim he settled largely because a young city superintendent had emailed, about a retaining wall barrier, should we be putting this stuff on the bottom here even though we know it fails. His rule for PMs and supers is observe and report: emails should state facts, never conclusions or opinions, because one day they go up on a courtroom projector in front of a jury.

"Superintendents, PMs, you need to think every time that you send something. I know it's a little scary to think, but every time you send something, think, is that gonna be exhibit 12?"

GARRETT MOTT • 26:00

THE MOVE Before you hit send, strip the email down to what you observed: dates, names, events. If a question needs an expert answer, route it to the architect, engineer, or supplier who owns that lane instead of stating your own conclusion.

GARRETT MOTT • CONSTRUCTION TRIAL LAWYER, HENNIGH
LAW • [HEAR IT AT 26:00 →](#)

Daily logs written the same day are admissible gold. Documentation created after a dispute starts has almost no credibility.

Garrett Mott gets daily reports admitted under California's business records exception because routine records made every day carry an indicia of reliability, and in one trial a super's red spiral-bound log books, kept daily for multiple years and stacked high, went straight into evidence. That diligence once uncovered fraud: after a dispute, a sub blew up a change order with post hoc hours and extra people, but the super had logged exactly which subs worked, at what times, with how many people, so one letter ended it and the sub pulled way back. In another matter a fabricated work log, which Mott believes was AI-generated, claimed a man worked 116 hours in a single day when the super's notes showed four. Post hoc documentation gets knocked out by courts or shredded on the stand, while same-day notes are, in his words, absolute gold.

"Evidence that is post hoc, evidence that's created after a dispute arises, has drastically low credibility. Juries understand it immediately."

GARRETT MOTT · 1:02:58

THE MOVE Write the daily log the same day, every day, with names, times, headcounts, and what happened, and keep the format consistent across the whole job. Never reconstruct records after a dispute starts.

GARRETT MOTT · CONSTRUCTION TRIAL LAWYER, HENNIGH
LAW · [HEAR IT AT 1:02:58 →](#)

If you send the problem email to 25 people, nobody owns it. Name one person or it will not get done.

When Wes Juergens came back on the show after moving up to a regional superintendent role, he zeroed in on why very large projects sink: communication. On a smaller job a PM or PE covers seven or eight scopes and overhears everything in the trailer, but on a hundred person team each engineer owns a single scope, so the concrete engineer has no idea what the elevator guy or the window guy is doing. Wes borrows a saying from an experienced friend in the industry: if everybody's got it, nobody's got it. An email to two people gets handled because one of them makes sure it happens, while the same email to 25 people dies because everyone assumes somebody else is on it. His fix is written role expectations set early, so every problem lands on a name.

"If everybody's got it, then nobody's got it. If I send that email out to 25 people and say, hey, this is a big problem, they all just assume that somebody else is doing it."

WES JUERGENS · 26:29

THE MOVE Assign the problem to one named person with a deadline, then inform the wider group. Put written role expectations in place at kickoff so every scope has a single owner.

WES JUERGENS · REGIONAL SUPERINTENDENT · [HEAR IT AT 26:29 →](#)

Zero RFIs on a project is a red flag that nobody asked the right questions, not a win to brag about.

Alex Belkofer runs VDC for McCarthy Building Companies, where the return on digital work gets framed as the cost of goals not scored, his goalie analogy for the 70 or 80 saves in a big game that nobody counts because the team kept winning. McCarthy pulls the risk curve forward into the design phase, blocking and tackling issues digitally so they never become RFIs in the field. He has seen projects brag about delivering zero RFIs, and he pushes back: a silent log usually means the team never verified its line of sight to the risk profile before field execution. The healthy signal is streamlined, higher quality RFIs with faster answers, not a low count.

"There's projects that are out there that say we've had zero RFIs. I would challenge and question though, is it good that there are no RFIs?"

ALEX BELKOFER · 20:32

THE MOVE Audit the RFI log for quality, not quantity. If a scope produced zero RFIs, ask whether the team actually had line of sight to its risk profile with the digital tools before field execution, and treat silence as unexamined risk.

ALEX BELKOFER · SENIOR DIRECTOR OF VDC, MCCARTHY BUILDING COMPANIES · [HEAR IT AT 20:32 →](#)

You cannot fix a bad buy. Scope missed at buyout comes straight out of margin with no way to recover it.

Charles Ma, a structural engineer turned bootstrapped founder, chose Scoreboard AI's first workflow after discovery interviews with builders kept returning the same line: you can't fix a bad buy. Buyout is where the budget is set, and the operations team gets only a couple of weeks to write subcontracts, manually pulling scope inclusions out of thousands of pages of unstructured plans and specs. Anything missed in that window is never repriced; it comes directly out of profit margin later in the job. Stuff slips through the cracks until the last responsible moment, then blows up as a fire drill, which is why his tool scans the documents and pulls job specific scope inclusions for every trade.

"What we heard over and over again was you can't fix a bad buy. Scope buyout, that's where the budget is set. If you miss something, if you don't price it in during buyout, it comes directly out of your profit margin later on."

CHARLES MA · 14:29

THE MOVE Treat the buyout window as the most expensive few weeks on the job. Before subcontracts are signed, walk every bid package against the plans and specs for job specific scope inclusions, and put experienced eyes on what the estimate's first pass missed.

CHARLES MA · FOUNDER AND CEO, SCOREBOARD AI · [HEAR IT AT 14:29 →](#)

Forty-five checklists completed within two minutes of each other is a pencil-whipping signature the data will expose later.

Tim Smith's owner-side commissioning team at QTS lives in the field, capped at 30 minutes a day in the site office, and one of the things they hunt is whether Level 2 arrival inspections actually happened. The tell is right in the commissioning platform: open CxAlloy and find 45 checklists all completed within two minutes of each other. When Level 2 gets pencil-whipped, the failures surface later as holdups in Level 3 and then Level 4 testing. Tim finds it is almost never malice, just a lack of education about why the checklist matters, so the response is mentoring rather than punishment, and catching it early actually aids the schedule.

"Did you actually do it, or did you just pencil whip the checklist? Can we go in and look at CxAlloy and see forty-five checklists that were all done within two minutes of each other?"

TIM SMITH · 35:52

THE MOVE Audit checklist completion timestamps every week and flag batches closed minutes apart. Respond by mentoring the crew on why the inspection matters downstream, not by writing them up.

TIM SMITH · DIRECTOR OF COMMISSIONING, QTS DATA CENTERS · [HEAR IT AT 35:52 →](#)

Hit only 25 percent of critical path milestones for eight straight months and you have forfeited any claim to a time extension.

On a \$200M project where Joe Wilson's team supported the owner's rep, the scheduling data showed the contractor hitting only about 25 percent of critical path milestones on time. The contractor kept saying they would be fine, month after month, until they finally admitted to a month of delay just three months before completion. By then the one-month pattern had stretched to eight months of consistent underperformance, and the data itself had built the owner's case: the contractor had forfeited any entitlement to a time extension. The pattern, not any single missed date, was what closed the door.

"When one month pattern turns into three, that turns into eight months of basically not improving. Now all of a sudden you've built up a case where, okay guys, you're not entitled to any kind of extra time here."

JOE WILSON

THE MOVE Track your critical path hit rate every month and confront a slipping pattern within the first month or two. Never let a string of reassurances run long enough to become the owner's case against you.

JOE WILSON • FOUNDER AND CEO, PROJEXION • [HEAR IT →](#)

02

SUPERS

PMS

EXECs & OWNERS

EP 054

Lead with the answer. 'This part is behind because of X, here is what we do about it.' Then earn the Gantt chart.

Libby Magliolo spent over a decade building presentations at PwC and Southwest Airlines before founding The Slide Master and teaching SMU Cox MBAs to present. At Southwest, you could not even get on the executive team's calendar without declaring whether your presentation was an inform, a discuss, or a decide. She teaches that most updates are structured like murder mysteries, context and background building to a reveal, when audiences give you maybe 30 good seconds of attention and communication should work like a newspaper article with the headline first. For an OAC meeting that means opening with one sentence, this part of the project is running behind due to XYZ and here is what we need to do about it, and only flipping to the Gantt chart when someone asks.

"Lead with the answer. Don't walk me through the process that you walked through to get to the answer. Give me the answer and then walk me through the process."

LIBBY MAGLIOLO • 13:30

THE MOVE Open every update with the one-sentence headline: what is behind, why, and what you are doing about it. Keep the Gantt chart and the backup detail in reserve for when the room asks.

LIBBY MAGLIOLO • FOUNDER, THE SLIDE MASTER • [HEAR IT AT 13:30 →](#)

Help the electrician solve the problem on site today and he will not hit you with a change order tomorrow.

Steve Little, who directs facilities and engineering for The Fresh Market, was walking a store job the week of the recording and found the electrician's work was not quite per the plans. Instead of forcing a rip-out, he walked it with the electrician and suggested an alternate route that got closer to the plan and still met its intent, and the electrician was over the moon because he did not have to tear out what he had built. Steve's bet is on reciprocity: if he later asks that same electrician for one more outlet tapped off the nearby circuit, no change order is coming. For him that is what a real trade partnership looks like, interpersonal credit built one solved problem at a time.

"I guarantee you, if I asked him, hey man, I need to make one more outlet right over here, you can tap off of this, you think he'd hit me with a change order after I just helped him?"

STEVE LITTLE · 35:17

THE MOVE When a trade's work drifts from the plans, walk it with them in person and find the fix that avoids rip-out before reaching for the contract. Bank the goodwill and spend it on the small asks later.

STEVE LITTLE · DIRECTOR OF FACILITIES AND
ENGINEERING, THE FRESH MARKET · [HEAR IT AT 35:17 →](#)

Raw data handed to a decision maker is not help. It is work you were supposed to do and pushed onto them.

Libby asked her engineer husband Ryan whether their girls needed rain jackets for a trip, and he opened the weather app and read her the high, the low, and the percent chance of rain for every one of the five or six days, then looked up as if the case was closed. She uses the story in trainings because that is what professionals do to decision makers all the time: hand over raw data and quietly outsource the analysis. The job is the sentence, we're twelve percent over budget and it's due to this reason, not the spreadsheet behind it. In the AI age she sharpens the point further: you are ChatGPT for your CEO, expected to ingest the 30-page report and answer the question.

"Bringing people raw data almost always creates work for them, because basically you're saying, I didn't analyze this, I didn't get any insights from this, but you can if you want to."

LIBBY MAGLIOLO · 22:06

THE MOVE Do the analysis before you walk in: state the number, the driver, and the recommendation in one sentence. Park the full data set in an appendix for whoever asks.

LIBBY MAGLIOLO · FOUNDER, THE SLIDE MASTER · [HEAR IT AT 22:06 →](#)

Walk the constructability with the foreman face to face. A short email is where a generation hides from hard conversations.

Steve Little and the hosts dug into what got lost when construction management moved behind screens, and Stephen admitted he had lived it himself, more comfortable in BIM 360 and Last Planner views than walking with the foreman challenging constructability ideas. Steve's diagnosis is that technology has become a buffer that gives people a safe space to be on the job without interacting with it, because challenging somebody in person is genuinely harder than firing off a short email. He contrasts it with the old OAC discipline of running the logs and driving the schedule face to face, and with the real relationships built by getting bloodied up together on site. The jobsite walk with the electrician that same week was his proof of what the in-person version still buys you.

"It's a whole lot more difficult to challenge somebody face to face than it is over a short email."

STEVE LITTLE · 33:57

THE MOVE Take constructability challenges to the foreman in person and keep email for documenting what was agreed. If the conversation could change the outcome, have it face to face on the walk.

STEVE LITTLE · DIRECTOR OF FACILITIES AND
ENGINEERING, THE FRESH MARKET · [HEAR IT AT 33:57 →](#)

29

SUPERS

PMS

EP 003

If you are not doing concrete lift drawings and MEP coordination before a pour, you are leaving risk on a 16-hour activity you cannot undo.

Jack Desloge came out of McCarthy's field operations before becoming a Senior VDC Manager at VIATechnik, and he calls concrete planning VDC's highest-leverage low-hanging fruit. Nothing moves a job faster than a concrete pour and nothing is harder to fix afterward: it is a high-dollar activity that happens in about 16 hours and cannot be undone. Lift drawings plus MEP coordination before the pour de-risk exactly that moment, catching embeds, sleeves, and conflicts while they are still lines on a drawing instead of problems in cured concrete. Skipping that work leaves an outsized pile of risk sitting on the schedule's fastest-moving activity.

"If you're not doing some aspect of concrete planning and concrete lift drawing development... you're leaving a lot of risk on the table for an activity that happens in 16 hours."

JACK DESLOGE

THE MOVE Make concrete lift drawings and pre-pour MEP coordination standard scope on every job, and aim your VDC hours at the pour before any other workflow.

JACK DESLOGE • SR. VDC MANAGER, VIATECHNIK • [HEAR IT →](#)

It is not the guy in the trailer that builds the job. Make young PMs lay block and walk steel so they respect the craft.

At Barton Malow, Rener co-created a program called Building Skills that sent young project managers to school for a day, once a month or every other month across the 16 CSI divisions, to physically do the trade work. One engineer proudly took an hour to lay a single perfect block and was told you cannot lay one block an hour; others placed yards of concrete, framed small sheds, and walked steel at the ironworkers training center. The point was humility, understanding why a plasterer with 20 years of experience makes the work look effortless. A degree does not put the work in place, and without genuine appreciation for the trades it just gets you chased back into the trailer.

"We want you to appreciate what these tradespeople do, and it takes a while to get good at what they do. If not for them, the jobs don't get built. It's not the guy in the trailer that builds the job."

ANDREW RENER · 12:28

THE MOVE Put young PMs and estimators through real trade work, laying block, placing concrete, walking steel, early in their careers, so they manage from respect for the craft instead of a title in the trailer.

ANDREW RENER · EXECUTIVE, ARCHITECTURAL METALS ·

[HEAR IT AT 12:28 →](#)

09

SUPERS

PMS

EP 055

Write the commissioning schedule assuming it will be cut, because every week and dollar lost upstream gets taken from the end.

Tim Smith has spent more than 30 years commissioning power plants from Kuwait and Saudi Arabia to Oklahoma City and Boston, and now directs commissioning for QTS Data Centers. In all that time, commissioning has been the project's relief valve: lose two weeks on the base build, pull it from commissioning; lose a million dollars of budget, pull it from commissioning. By the time actual startup arrives, the team is a dollar late and a day short. So he writes every commissioning schedule assuming shortfalls, because the bid-format version never survives. The data center boom has only amplified the squeeze, making it a struggle to commission at the quality the end users expect.

"We lost two weeks on the base build, let's pull it from commissioning. We lost a million dollars on budget, let's pull it from commissioning. So by the time you get to actual startup, you're a dollar late and a day short."

TIM SMITH • 4:08

THE MOVE Build the project schedule backwards from the drop dead turnover date with every commissioning step in it, and let that force changes to the build schedule. Write the commissioning plan assuming shortfalls will land on it.

TIM SMITH • DIRECTOR OF COMMISSIONING, QTS DATA CENTERS • [HEAR IT AT 4:08 →](#)

Missed submittal dates are the earliest reliable warning of schedule delay. Track them before you track anything else.

Joe Wilson built a spreadsheet-based risk analytics tool during COVID for a \$100M project that was going poorly, and that work became his company, which builds data foundations for contractors. Across the projects he analyzes, submittal adherence is the single best leading indicator of schedule risk: teams that miss submittal due dates go on to incur schedule delays. The problem is that the system-of-record workflow for updating submittals runs one item at a time, and in an industry that values speed, teams default to Excel the moment the system is slower than they need it to be. That fragmentation destroys the very indicator that would have warned them, and makes portfolio-level analytics nearly impossible.

"Submittals are one of the key early indicators of a project at risk. If you're missing your dates and your submittals, it's likely that you will be incurring delays on your schedule."

JOE WILSON

THE MOVE Track submittal date adherence in the system of record from day one and report it before any other metric. Fix whatever workflow friction is pushing your team to Excel, because the indicator dies with the fragmentation.

JOE WILSON • FOUNDER AND CEO, PROJEXION • [HEAR IT →](#)

The schedule is the plan. Perfect RFIs and submittals cannot save a job where nobody trusts or is aligned to it.

Franco Giaquinto built the scheduling startup Ipsum in Chile and relaunched it in the US as Outbuild, having picked the space with his founder filter: find the biggest shit show in an industry and fix it. He argues the old scheduling tools promote unhealthy habits, terrible coordination, bad relationships between stakeholders, and no clear plan to get back on track, ending in claims and legal disputes that now involve more money and more time than ever. Nobody was supporting the field, where the reality of the project actually lives. His founding thesis is that perfect paperwork cannot compensate for a plan the team does not believe in or align to.

"You can have the best RFIs, the best submittals, the best everything, but if your plan is shit and no one is aligned, it's very hard to end up on the right track."

FRANCO GIAQUINTO · 5:12

THE MOVE Fix plan trust before buying any other PM tool: build one schedule the field, the trades, and the office all believe in and align to, and treat alignment to it as the leading indicator of project health.

FRANCO GIAQUINTO · CO-FOUNDER AND CEO, OUTBUILD ·

[HEAR IT AT 5:12 →](#)

05

PMS

EXECs & OWNERS

EP 053

Deliberately recruit your loudest known detractor into the pilot so objections surface before the enterprise rollout.

Elliot Christiansen ran the Trunk Tools rollout at Cleveland Construction as a sequence of pilots: a first trunk text pilot on a job already 75 percent complete with messy data and staff turnover, then three more pilots on three jobs under three different project executives to widen the sample. When he staffs a pilot he deliberately mixes demographics and seats two known quantities, a future champion who can help train project teams later, and the person he knows will hate the change. The detractor tells him everything wrong with the tool, and Elliot carries that list back to the tech company to work through while still in the pilot stage. By the time a tool goes enterprise-wide across the roughly 120 people in Cleveland's GC division, the loudest objections have already been flushed out.

"I usually do try to pick somebody that I know probably will hate change, he'll probably hate doing this, but I'm gonna get him involved in the pilot because he's gonna tell me all the things that are wrong with it."

ELLIOT CHRISTIANSEN · 32:18

THE MOVE Name your loudest skeptic to the pilot team on day one and route every complaint straight to the vendor while the deployment is still small. Save your champions for training duty at rollout.

ELLIOT CHRISTIANSEN · SVP OPERATIONS, CLEVELAND
CONSTRUCTION · [HEAR IT AT 32:18 →](#)

Never introduce a new tool and a new process in the same rollout. One is change management; both is a multi-year slog.

Aaron McClellan runs construction technology at Granite Construction, where every candidate solution goes through a build versus buy evaluation. Security comes first, with Granite's IT department running cybersecurity analysis because the company does federal work. Then the team evaluates the process itself and matches the solution to the existing process, specifically so they do not have to go through massive change management. A new technology is already one piece of change management on its own; introduce a new technology and change the process at the same time and you are talking about a very long adoption. The guiding question is whether they can get the tool to operations as fast as possible with as little change as necessary.

"If you introduce a new technology, that's already one piece of change management that has to happen. So if you start introducing a new technology and changing the process, you're talking a long time."

AARON MCCLELLAN · 9:45

THE MOVE Map the candidate tool against your existing process before you buy, and pick the option that changes only one variable. If the tool truly requires a new process, run the process change as its own separate rollout.

AARON MCCLELLAN · CONSTRUCTION TECHNOLOGY MANAGER,
GRANITE CONSTRUCTION · [HEAR IT AT 9:45 →](#)

Distrust any vendor claim of hours saved per week. Those are hours 41 to 50, not the hours that matter.

John Riggs, a Senior Project Manager at Suffolk, has grown numb to vendor marketing that promises hours saved per week, because the hours a tool saves are rarely the hours that matter on a jobsite. With project lifespans running two to four years, even piloting a product across 20 jobsites cannot produce real success metrics quickly, so claims about how many projects a tool has been used on and how well it worked deserve skepticism on their face. His warning to vendors is that overselling to get in the door guarantees disappointment on the job, and his own rule is that innovation should be judged on iteration, where five near-misses and a sixth-try success is the right aim.

"We saved you 10 hours a week on average. I don't know if you will. Those are probably hours 41 to 50. Or 61 to 70."

JOHN RIGGS

THE MOVE Ask every vendor how long and on how many completed projects their metrics were actually measured, and evaluate the tool on whether it removes the hours that matter, not the total it claims to save.

JOHN RIGGS • SENIOR PROJECT MANAGER, SUFFOLK • [HEAR IT →](#)

Require usage dashboards from every vendor, because people will tell you they use the tool when the data says zero.

On a site visit Elliot asked one of his Cleveland Construction superintendents how the new Trunk RFI tool was working, and the super said he thought they had asked it twelve questions the other day. Elliot called his Trunk Tools rep, pulled the usage report for that job, and found the superintendent had personally asked zero; other people's questions added up to the twelve. He called the super back and told him to start asking questions. That is why Cleveland now requires every software vendor to provide usage dashboards, either standing access or regular reports from the back end, so he can verify teams are actually using what the company pays for instead of relying on self-report.

"I've made a conscious effort of making sure that all of the people that we work with will provide us usage dashboards on a regular basis."

ELLIOT CHRISTIANSEN · 34:17

THE MOVE Write usage reporting into every software contract before you sign: standing dashboard access or a scheduled export from the vendor's back end. Check it against what teams tell you, and follow up on the zeros.

ELLIOT CHRISTIANSEN · SVP OPERATIONS, CLEVELAND
CONSTRUCTION · [HEAR IT AT 34:17 →](#)

06

PMS

EXECs & OWNERS

EP 028

Only automate a task that is both repetitive and annoying. If it is not annoying, let your people keep doing it.

Sarah Buchner started as a carpenter at 12 and spent 15 years in the field before a fatality on her Berlin high-rise pushed her into construction software, where she founded Trunk Tools. Her triage rule for construction companies is a two-part test: only automate work that is both repetitive and annoying. If a task is not repetitive, AI will struggle to get good at it, and if it is not annoying, people actually enjoy doing it and should keep it. By her count roughly 80 percent of white-collar construction workflows fail the necessity test, but even there she designs agents like her submittal agent to do the bureaucratic 95 percent while leaving the final call to the human, because fully automating those steps means the industry forgets how to do them within five to ten years.

"If a task is repetitive and annoying, you should throw AI against it. Because if it's not repetitive, it's probably going to be hard to make an AI really good at it."

DR. SARAH BUCHNER

THE MOVE Run every automation candidate through the two-question filter: is it repetitive, and is it annoying. If it fails either test, leave it with your people, and when you do automate, keep the decision in human hands.

DR. SARAH BUCHNER • FOUNDER AND CEO, TRUNK TOOLS •
[HEAR IT →](#)

The real AI risk is not security. It is someone shipping the first draft as the final draft.

Hugh Seaton, founder of The Link, has read plenty of corporate AI policies, and almost all of them obsess over security, which he calls the least of a contractor's worries. The bigger danger is the easy button: AI gives great demos, cannot answer concisely, and knows nothing about your specific job. It hands back a first draft of an answer, and people who ship that draft as the final product are the ones who get their companies in trouble. His prescription for GC leadership starts small: get your arms around the chatbots your people are already using and train them to prompt and to review.

"It doesn't know what's going on in your job. It doesn't have any judgment like a human would. It's going to give you a first draft of an answer, and if people treat that like a final draft, they're going to get in trouble."

HUGH SEATON · 9:38

THE MOVE Rewrite the AI policy around review, not just data security. Train teams on prompting, and make it a rule that every AI output is a first draft that gets human judgment applied before it goes out the door.

HUGH SEATON · FOUNDER, THE LINK · [HEAR IT AT 9:38 →](#)

When you try to automate a process you discover how much unpriced judgment the 'not that bright' guy was adding.

Hugh Seaton, founder of The Link and now an AI strategy consultant to contractors, pushes back on human in the loop as a throwaway phrase that usually means automate everything and stick an approval at the end. In his experience you cannot automate as much as you think, and the attempt is exactly what reveals how much unpriced judgment people add, including the guy nobody rates as bright. Pull those people out of the process and you do not just take a little pain later, you introduce brand new risk that nobody budgeted. His frame for leadership is to treat expertise as a strategic asset: figure out what it is, capture it, and elevate people rather than skim tasks.

"When you try to automate a thing, you realize how smart people are. Even the guy that you don't think is that bright is adding a ton of value in the process. If you pull people out of it, you introduce new risk."

HUGH SEATON · 9:36

THE MOVE Before automating any process, map the judgment the humans inside it are quietly adding and price the new risk of removing them. Capture and elevate that expertise instead of just deleting the headcount.

HUGH SEATON · FOUNDER, THE LINK · [HEAR IT AT 9:36 →](#)

An LLM does not know it is wrong and wants to please you, so it will build your confidence on the wrong path.

Michael Zeppieri of Skanska USA, who came to construction from systems engineering at West Point and software at Boeing, names a specific operational hazard in the industry's rush to chat-based AI. An LLM does not know when it is wrong, and it is built to please you, so instead of correcting a flawed plan it reinforces it, building your confidence that you are on the right path. That turns the tool into a confirmation bias machine at exactly the moment you think you are checking your judgment. For anyone using a chatbot to pressure-test a construction decision, the agreeable answer is the one to distrust most.

"Not only does it not know it's wrong, it wants to please you, so it actually builds your confidence that you're on the right path... in many ways it's confirmation bias."

MICHAEL ZEPPIERI

THE MOVE Treat an LLM's agreement as a warning sign rather than validation. Force it to argue against your position, and verify any consequential call with a person who knows the work.

MICHAEL ZEPPIERI • VP OF DIGITAL SOLUTIONS, SKANSKA USA • [HEAR IT →](#)

03

SUPERS

PMS

EP 005

The company will always do what is best for the company, so you must do what is best for you and your family.

Mitch bled Lusardi red for 17 years, and when his first son Mason was born he was back on a Bay Area job a week later, driving down to San Diego every couple of weeks, so he saw the boy maybe six or eight times in his first six months. Leaving took him two years to work up to, and CEO Scott Free flew up to ask what happened because nobody at the company believed Mitch would go. Before the jump he asked Mike, the owner of MC Painting, for guidance and got the sentence that reframed his career: the company's decisions will always be best for the company, and only sometimes will they happen to align with what is best for you. He joined XL Construction in 2014 vowing never to bleed for a company that way again, and now manages a work-life rhythm instead of chasing balance.

"You always need to do right in what's good for you and your family, because the company will always do what's best for the company."

MITCH MCDONALD • 30:49

THE MOVE Run every career decision through the family test first: what serves you and your family, then check whether the company's ask happens to align. When the two diverge, choose your side deliberately instead of defaulting to the company.

MITCH MCDONALD • GENERAL SUPERINTENDENT, XL
CONSTRUCTION • [HEAR IT AT 30:49 →](#)

Finishing on schedule and budget only buys you the right to bid the next one. The career gets built in moments not in the contract.

Sean Johnson, founder of Madison Consulting Services, builds on The Discipline of Market Leaders: you can win on best product, on operational efficiency, or on customer intimacy, and only the third lane is open to everybody. Hitting schedule and budget is table stakes, the price of being allowed to bid the next one, while the owner who asks for you by name gets made in small moments that were never in the contract. His formative example is a hotel clerk who ran into town through a blizzard to buy the Diet Coke the front desk did not stock. He systematizes the idea with a champagne fridge labeled champagne is for closers, opening a bottle with every new client no matter the size.

"It's really hard to compete on best product and it's really hard to compete on operational efficiency. But everybody can do customer intimacy if they want to."

SEAN JOHNSON · 22:07

THE MOVE Build your own playbook of deliberate moments for owners and architects, a handwritten note, a celebration ritual, a weekly check in, and run it on every project instead of repeating one good gesture once and hoping schedule and budget do the rest.

SEAN JOHNSON · FOUNDER, MADISON CONSULTING SERVICES
• [HEAR IT AT 22:07 →](#)

Never burn a bridge in commercial construction. You will work with the same people again wearing different hard hats.

Wes Juergens has spent his career as a superintendent in Houston commercial construction, and his experience is that the fourth-largest city in the country operates like a small town. Crews, foremen, and managers cross paths again and again across projects and companies for decades, often on opposite sides of the table from where they last met. That reality turns bridge-burning from a momentary release into a career-limiting move, because the person you torch today will be back on your next job wearing a different color hard hat. His advice is to protect the relationship even when the job or the dispute goes sideways.

"Don't burn that bridge, dude, because we'll be back around soon. We might be wearing different color hard hats the next time we see each other."

WES JUERGENS

THE MOVE End every job, dispute, and departure with the relationship intact, and assume the person across the table will show up on your next project in a different role.

WES JUERGENS • SENIOR SUPERINTENDENT, AUSTIN
COMMERCIAL • [HEAR IT →](#)

Create value for the person two levels above you and advancement takes care of itself.

Aaron McClellan did 11 years in the Army, with the 82nd Airborne and then Special Forces at 5th Group, and came into construction on paper unexperienced and unqualified. What carried over was a single value rule: whatever you are doing in your current job, the value you contribute needs to reach the person sitting two levels above you, your boss's boss. He argues that if you have that mindset you will succeed in the industry, no doubt about it, and that companies cannot cap someone generating that much value. The alternative he warns against is staying what the military calls the gray man, floating in the middle, which is exactly where you will stay.

"Your value that you're contributing needs to attribute to the person that's sitting two levels above you. If you have that mindset, then you're gonna succeed in the industry, no doubt about it."

AARON MCCLELLAN · 43:50

THE MOVE Before you take on any piece of work, ask how it creates value for your boss's boss, then make that contribution visible to them. Do not settle into being the gray man in the middle.

AARON MCCLELLAN · CONSTRUCTION TECHNOLOGY MANAGER,
GRANITE CONSTRUCTION · [HEAR IT AT 43:50 →](#)