

THE SUPERINTENDENT 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 →](#)

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 →](#)

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 →](#)

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SUPERS

EP 005

The skills flip at general superintendent. Senior super is 80 percent technical; general super is 80 percent soft skills.

Mitch started at Lusardi as a carpenter in 1997, was running work as an acting superintendent by 1998, and made general superintendent at XL Construction in 2018, in his mid forties when most reach the role in their late fifties. The promotion inverted his job: senior superintendent ran on 80 percent technical skill, general superintendent runs on 80 percent soft skills. The work became guiding what he calls the collective mass of trades, building enough trust that the ball rolls on its own while he only nudges its speed and direction, because a really good superintendent does not direct, order, or tell. The skill set that got you through one stage, he warns, is not the skill set the next stage needs.

"The skill set that you need as a successful senior superintendent is 80% technical skills and 20% soft skills. The skill set you need to be a successful general superintendent is 80% soft skills and 20% technical skills."

MITCH MCDONALD • 33:13

THE MOVE Before chasing the next title, ask what ratio of technical to people work that job actually runs on, and start practicing the soft-skill side now: guide the trades toward a shared outcome instead of directing them.

MITCH MCDONALD • GENERAL SUPERINTENDENT, XL
CONSTRUCTION • [HEAR IT AT 33:13 →](#)

Before blaming a worker's choice, prove the work was planned, the equipment was there, and the training and time existed.

David Tibbetts of Highwire insists that root cause analysis exhaust every systemic failure before anyone reaches for personal choice as the explanation. The questions come in order: did we plan the work effectively, did we set the worker up for success, did they have the equipment, the time, and the training. His working group's data shows why the discipline matters, finding four times as many serious-injury-potential exposures as recordable incidents across participating projects, most of them untracked. Jumping to blame closes the investigation exactly where the fatal patterns live, and only after the systemic questions are answered honestly can an individual factor even enter the conversation.

"Only after we've convinced ourselves of all those things can we start to even think about an individual factor like a personal choice."

DAVID TIBBETTS

THE MOVE In every incident review, work the systemic checklist first: planning, equipment, time, and training. Do not allow personal choice into the conversation until every one of those has been honestly cleared.

DAVID TIBBETTS • CHIEF SAFETY OFFICER, HIGHWIRE •
[**HEAR IT →**](#)

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 →](#)

If the GC super walks the site with his harness strap undone, every trade will too. Injuries trace back to the example you set.

As a regional superintendent dropped into troubled jobs, Wes Juergens starts with culture, and he ties injuries and quality escapes directly back to the GC's own example. If the superintendent walks the site with his harness straps undone, his vest unzipped, and his safety glasses swinging from his hand, every trade reads that as the real standard, the same way un-pre-punched GC inspection requests tell trade partners quality does not matter. His favorite proof it can work the other way: a laborer with a shovel turned around and told Wes to put his gloves on, while Wes's own people stared in disbelief. Wes thanked him on the spot and recognized him at the next all-hands safety meeting, because a crew unafraid to call out the boss is the goal state.

"If the superintendent's walking around and his straps undone and his vest is unzipped and swinging his safety glasses in his hands, you're setting the example right there."

WES JUERGENS • 14:12

THE MOVE Wear every piece of PPE correctly yourself and pre-punch your own areas before calling inspections. When a craft worker calls out a leader on safety, thank them publicly at the next site meeting.

WES JUERGENS • REGIONAL SUPERINTENDENT • [HEAR IT AT 14:12 →](#)

Running 400 adults at 6am as a dictatorship will fail. People only listen when they are part of the conversation.

Chris Masse runs daily coordination for hundreds of workers as a senior superintendent at EllisDon, getting roughly 400 adults moving in the same direction at 6am. His conclusion is that dictatorship fails at that scale: people listen when they are part of the conversation and tune out when they are treated as subordinates receiving orders. Construction culture still rewards command-and-control, and the industry talks constantly about being in control while rarely talking about being an incredible teammate, which Masse and his coach Tim Smith argue is the more effective posture. The daily huddle works because the crews help shape the plan they are about to execute.

"People will listen when they're part of the conversation, but if it's going to be a dictatorship, I think you're going to fail."

CHRIS MASSE

THE MOVE Run morning coordination as a conversation, not a briefing. Give crews a real voice in shaping the day's plan so they execute a plan they helped build.

CHRIS MASSE • SENIOR SUPERINTENDENT, ELLISDON •

[HEAR IT →](#)

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 →](#)

Put model due, signed off, shop drawings in, and approved for install in the field schedule and track them like a bottom-out date.

Wally Castro, a superintendent at Bernards who started at Turner, answered the question of what VDC misses with one word: schedule. His current City of Ontario job was sold as an eight week coordination cycle on a three story building, so he demands per level dates from the VDC team: model due, model signed off, shop drawings in, shop drawings approved and ready for install. He wants every one of those dates living in his field schedule so that when something slips he captures the movement and can see whether it is detrimental to installation, and he makes his drop dead dates known early. He has watched design build jobs where the design catches the construction and the job ends up totally shot, costing the owner money instead of saving it, with no way to recover.

"This day level one will be due. This day level one will be signed off. This day level one shop drawings will be in. This day level one shop drawings will be approved and ready for install. I want all those days in my schedule."

WALLY CASTRO · 22:10

THE MOVE Load every VDC milestone, model due, signed off, shop drawings in, approved for install, into the master field schedule by level, and track them weekly like pour dates with drop dead dates communicated up front.

WALLY CASTRO · SUPERINTENDENT, BERNARDS · [HEAR IT AT 22:10 →](#)

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 →](#)

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SUPERS

EP 011

Field tech does not save you months on the schedule. It gives you your time back and real data when a dispute lands.

Chris Masse, a senior superintendent at EllisDon, admits he was a late adopter still running jobs with Crayolas, highlighters, and 11 by 17s before a pilot project changed his mind. When co-host Lars asked whether the technology actually returns time, his answer was blunt: if you expect it to save months on the schedule, it will not, and that expectation sets you up for disappointment. What it gives back is his own personal time, plus real data when a conflict lands, laid out as you did this, I did this, here is the proof, so both sides come to an agreement and carry on. He figures it is 99 percent right and he will take that all day long.

"If you think it's going to save you months on the schedule, it's not. What it's giving me is my time back, and allowing me to present real data in the event of a conflict."

CHRIS MASSE • 23:28

THE MOVE Sell and measure field tech on the superintendent's personal time returned and on dispute ready records, not schedule compression. When a conflict lands, bring the laid out data, agree, and carry on.

CHRIS MASSE • SENIOR SUPERINTENDENT, ELLISDON •

[HEAR IT AT 23:28 →](#)

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SUPERS

PMS

EXECs & OWNERS

EP 030

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 →](#)