

PROJECT PARTNERING: A COMMON SENSE APPROACH TO BUILDING — AND BUSINESS

By **Vaughn Prost**

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The concept of construction project partnering, a process championed by Associated General Contractors (AGC) since 1992, is described as “a formal management process in which all parties to a project voluntarily agree at the outset to adopt a cooperative, team-based approach to project development and problem resolution to eliminate — or at least reduce — conflicts, litigation, and claims.”

In legal language, partnering is established as an obligation of good faith and fair dealing in its performance and enforcement — a process that the contractor, owner, consultants, and subs agree to — with a positive commitment to honesty and integrity. While that sounds like good, common sense, the concept of project partnering is still a bit foreign to some contractors and builders, but for Prost Builders, it’s a hallmark of how it does business.

Why does Prost Builders advocate for and emphasize project partnering? Think of project partnering as a vital step that takes place prior to the important pre-construction meeting, a process that builders, owners, and other involved entities are familiar with. The partnering development meeting — more of a seminar and team building workshop — occurs prior to the preconstruction meeting with all the key players. In this setting, all potential issues are discussed and there’s a process put in place to identify problems that might arise during the project, along with how those issues can be resolved.



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Vaughn Prost is the owner and president of Prost Builders Inc., a design/build and construction services firm located in Columbia. Vaughn has over forty years of domestic and international design and construction experience as a cost and scheduling engineer, structural engineer, owner’s construction representative, and general contractor.



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It’s not just a sincere handshake with the backing of a contractual agreement, but there’s that personal, face-to-face connection that is at the heart of partnering.

In the words of former AGC President Robins Jackson, “Boiled down to its lowest common denominator, partnering is a way to avoid disputes so they don’t need to be resolved.”

In a speech to an AGC conference three decades ago, Jackson added, “We don’t claim to have invented this perfectly logical concept. But we perfected it for contractors.”

Prost Builders was an early advocate of partnering and has scores of successful projects that have featured and demonstrated how it works. That success is established early on with the partnering development workshop with a level of decision-making — from lowest level to highest management level — that is agreed upon to resolve problems that are challenging to address during the project at lower management levels.

While the preconstruction meeting goes over contractual requirements and interface issues, the partnering workshop sets the agenda for how all parties will work as a partnership to resolve problems as a team. With that level of commitment and teamwork — and buy in from all parties — adversarial relationships do not have space to form.

One of many examples of how Prost Builders uses project partnering was a formal AGC partnering agreement between Prost Builders and the University of Missouri on a Veterinary Medicine School Addition and Renovation project. There was good buy-in from all parties and a smooth, successful project with all issues resolved quickly.

Projects like that bring the joy of creating building projects to owner, user, designer, and contractors, which means it’s a win-win for all parties, unlike traditional contracts and preconstruction parameters that often make it seem like in order for one “side” to win, others must lose. As we say at Prost Builders, “When you meet face to face in a partnering meeting a lot of stereotypes are broken down and you get to know the person with respect for each party’s point of view.”

Summing up the partnering concept, we take another look at Robins Jackson’s AGC speech from 1992: “The contract becomes an agreement between individuals who are known to each other by more than a formal contract on a piece of paper. Partnering puts the handshake back into the business relationship. ... it is a concept for bringing out the best in people — and people are the most important ingredient for creating a successful construction industry.”