

IF GOLDIE LOCKS WAS A DEVELOPER

Goldie Locks was quite selective, one of the pickiest fairy tale characters ever. She had no tolerance for anything that was too hot or too cold, too big or too small, too firm or too soft. She wanted everything to be just right. You know what? Goldie Locks may have been on to something. Hospitality developers should be just as picky.

The development industry is humming these days. Most of the design and construction world is pretty busy. This is the result of several factors, including, but not limited to, relatively low interest rates, a strong global economy, and new methods of financing projects such as the recent popularity of condo-hotels. And while we are in the midst of a very positive climate for development, the increased number of projects currently under development means that owners (and owner's representatives) have to pay particularly close attention to the progress of their own projects. One way that an owner can accomplish this is to monitor the pace of the design and construction process. A project that moves at just the right speed will yield a better end result, and likely save the owner some money at the same time.

Not Too Fast

About half of the projects I have been associated with over the past couple of years have had time frames which were unrealistically aggressive. Having held the role of owner myself in the past, I understand the ever-pressing urgency that owners feel to speed up the development process. I also understand that there are certain business factors, which the owner may not always be able to control, that can impact the development schedule. However, there is a threshold that, once crossed, negatively impacts the entire development effort. Fast-tracking is okay. Derailing is not.

In many cases, the schedules I have received did not accurately consider the time required for each task listed. More importantly, these schedules often did not consider the impact that each task would have on other disciplines or development milestones. In other words, each task seemed to be considered

independently, not collectively. For instance, while independent completion dates might allow all work to be completed, the absence of a comprehensive joint review would increase the likelihood of errors and poor coordination between the various team members. As a foodservice designer, we typically need to complete our work in advance of any stated deadlines so that the engineers have time to incorporate and coordinate the information we provide. Sometimes, the schedules we receive do not allow for this “luxury,” which is not really a luxury at all.

Does the owner have ample time to conduct a review of their own, and coordinate their findings with the operations of development teams? In one instance, there was a very large project that only allowed an owner three days for a full review. The end result was that the owner discovered many of the coordination items after the allotted time period. This led to expensive changes during construction and delays of the project. As I have preached before, design is a linear process. It is like a razor blade. If you go one direction, everything is fine. If you go in the wrong direction, it can be rather painful.

There is another common symptom of projects that move too fast. Though a schedule may dictate that the process is at a certain stage, the development effort has a pace which it cannot physically exceed. In other words, just because a schedule requires the completion of Design Development drawings, and the team issues a package labeled 100% Design development, it does not mean that the drawing status actually matches the label on the front page. Citing yet another recent project, the team issued a set of Design Development documents that were incomplete. But the derailing did not stop there. The schedule had dictated for the team to be well into construction documents, but in reality we were still working out design issues that had not been completed. I explained to the owner that regardless of what the schedule called stated, the actual status was determined by the activities of the team.

Not Too Slow

With all of this focus on not going too fast, it might seem like a wise idea to slow way down and go slow. Actually, there is a danger in proceeding too slowly as well. When this occurs, the owner often loses the attention, commitment, and focus of the development team. Whether it is a design team that is delayed or a contractor that pulls off of a job site, these sorts of disruptions to the natural flow of a project are usually detrimental. Besides, there are hidden costs to “remobilizing” that are often overlooked. When a development team is engaged and a project remains current, the entire team is focused. That is when the ideas come out and the best coordination occurs. Conversely, a project that goes too slow or is delayed for a long time can lose that same focus from the development team. Other more pressing projects may take precedence and require greater attention. The energy spent on your project may be redirected, and spent elsewhere. Critical details associated with the project may fall through the cracks. Previously completed work may become outdated, needing to be scrapped and started again from scratch. Each of these scenarios can lead to further time delays and additional costs that must be absorbed by the owner.

Just Right

The development team is like a car. It has the ability to get you from point A to point B, but without a driver the car will sit idle, and all of that potential will remain stationary and untapped. If we explore this analogy a little further, it is the driver that must control both the direction (steering) and the speed (gas or accelerator) of the car. The owner, or the owner’s representative, has similar responsibilities in the development process, needing to carefully monitor the direction and speed of the development team. So if you are in the midst of a development project, or are considering one, be prepared to get in the driver’s seat, buckle up, and drive your team safely. Oh, and before you buckle in, you may want to re-read Goldie Locks and the Three Bears ... just as a refresher. Goldie Locks was on to something.