

## Five Ways to Navigate Relationship Roadblocks with Trust & Positivity

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Being a construction contractor requires persistence and a willingness to take risks. It requires will and discipline to succeed, not the unreasonable overly optimistic Pollyanna approach.

Construction is a competitive industry that can be harsh at times. And often, competition is such that second place is reserved for the first loser. When you don't come out on top of the competition, survival requires the resiliency of a rubber band snapping back from being stretched and you can only allow a brief period of disappointment and frustration after being bested before you must try to win the next construction project.

It hurts to try hard and still experience failure, especially when the cycle can be relentless. But even failure has merit and can help you build character in a way that also builds your business.

### 1. Character

You will have character-forming experiences often in this industry. Character-building comes from experiences that illicit strong positive or negative emotional responses.

When you are in a situation and you are feeling something, can you put your finger on what it is you are feeling and why?

Can you control it? Whether your emotions are positive or negative, they must be managed through emotional intelligence, which has two elements: internal and external.



Internal emotional intelligence is your ability to detect and manage your emotions. External emotional intelligence is your ability to detect and manage your reactions to the emotions of others. Emotional intelligence is one part of the picture, and the things we choose to dwell on is another. Predominately positive thoughts lead to positive character, while predominantly negative thoughts lead to negative character.

### 2. Problem-Solving

When setbacks inevitably happen and your customers complain, their intuition tells them whether you can be trusted to solve the problem. Initially, the question about who is right and who is wrong doesn't matter. Instead, show empathy, apologize, thank them, and make decisions for what is in their best interest. What matters is getting into position for your next sale. Don't make excuses — people usually don't care why the problem occurred but just want to know what you are going to do to resolve it. Overmanage your customer complaints. View it as an opportunity to solidify, not destroy,

your relationship. And keep in mind, just because some of your customers don't complain doesn't mean they are happy with you. They may just let you fade away.

### 3. Preparation

Unforeseen conditions and surprises happen in construction more than in most industries. We don't get to rehearse, so conflict and problems are always right around the corner.

Recognize that some conflicts can be a waste of your intellectual and monetary capital, resulting in hollow victories tantamount to a defeat. If you position yourself for a win-lose conflict, such as drawing a line in the sand, then prepare yourself for stress, payment disruption, potential lawsuits, tarnished reputation, and rejection from future bid lists. Stick to the facts and manage your emotions. Be considerate of the other person's position even if you don't agree with it.

When deciding whether to enter a conflict, ask yourself, "If I do this, how will I feel six months from now?" Be principled about choosing your conflicts. Do not choose conflict as a remedy for retaliation or antagonism. That may feel good in the short term, but it will take you off the high road and lead you down the low road of bitterness and regret. Resolve conflicts with a triage approach that includes negotiation, arbitration, mediation and litigation.

### 4. Negotiation

Negotiating requires compromise, each party has to give something up in order to have their needs satisfied. Make a list of what you are willing to give away to get what you want. Don't give anything away unless you get something in return. Bear in mind the wise words of former first lady Eleanor Roosevelt, "Never allow a person to tell you no who doesn't have the power to say yes." The ability to negotiate with someone requires an open and honest rapport so problems can be settled objectively without drama.

Failed negotiations can result in arbitration, mediation, or litigation which typically stems from bad faith, hurt feelings, hard-headed egos, and an unwillingness to admit weakness. These methods are time consuming and require expensive payments to a third-party to convince you of your weakness, liabilities and vulnerabilities. Litigation is short for "scorched earth" and is a last resort.


### 5. Bridge-Building

Imagine relationships as a bridge with your company is on one side and the customer on the other. The reason for the bridge is to transfer money from the customer's bank into your bank. Money is transferred when you do two things for your customers: solve their problems and make them feel good. Trust is the brick and mortar of the relationship bridge. The customer trusts that you will fulfill all that is required and that you won't take advantage of their vulnerabilities. If there is no relationship bridge, then no money is transferred.

Relating to the customer starts with first impressions. People tend to evaluate others quickly. A first impression is a powerful thing and can heavily influence a relationship. You only have one chance to make a good first impression. Keep these tips in mind when you meet a new customer to make sure you start building trust right away.

- » Smile – A smile makes you likable and approachable. Smiles are understood by everyone and cannot be falsified.
- » Empathy – Empathy is having the ability and the desire to share the feelings that someone else is experiencing.
- » Honesty – Your customers require absolute honesty. Honesty is a discipline that demands not only external truth-telling, but also the internal willingness to recognize your strengths and weaknesses.
- » Promptness – When you're not prompt, your customer feels ignored and worries about their worth and value to you.
- » Listen – Listening is more than an act. It is a discipline, especially when everyone wants to get the last word in.
- » Solve problems – Problem solvers look for answers, not errors or blame. Problem-solving requires both reporting the problem and offering at least one solution.

I believe honesty is a major factor in success. Honesty is analogous to the word construction, the way something is built. Arrogance, on the other hand, is a negative trait which eventually leads to both business and personal failure.

If the construction industry had a map to success, I believe the words would be easy to read and the directions would be simple to understand. But, the actual route would not be simple. The map would illustrate many roadblocks, challenges, and blind spots. Successful travelers have the street smarts to know that unfortunate situations may be waiting around every corner. To successfully navigate the route requires a positive mindset. Success is about doing hundreds of things right and successfully managing the hundreds of things that go wrong. 



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## About the Author

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Joe Egan is president of Egan Connection Inc., a construction consulting, coaching and training company. He is also president of Egan Publications Inc. for the authorship and publication of his three books: “The General Contractor – How to be a Great Success or Failure”, “Construction Project Management – How the Great Ones do it”, and “Building Positive Character – 50 Tips on Empowerment, Overcoming and Success.” Egan is an adjunct professor at Minnesota State University School of Construction Management.

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## About the Article

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