

036 – Damages, the ever elusive “Who’s responsible?”

The bane of every construction supervisor is that thing we love to refer to as damages and/or repairs. Let’s not confuse damages and repairs with defects. Damages range from a chipped stone top to a missed building



component and everything damaged in between. No matter how you control, manage, or set up your fancy sequencing of works, it is inevitable that damage is going to happen. And without fail, the money men will be asking the ever-elusive question, “Who’s responsible?”

I am not sure what is worse when you know it was an accident and you are sending the bill regardless or getting the third degree for not knowing what happened. As we move from project to project, it never ceases to amaze me how what works on one project won’t work on the next one.

Keeping one site spotlessly clean with clear access and egress, you end up with a high volume of damages happening. On the next site, it’s an ongoing battle to keep everything orderly, yet the damages and repairs are ridiculously low. Talking to other supervisors, they have gone down the path of ruthlessly back-charging subcontractors with no success in keeping damages to a minimum.

I guess when you look at construction, our product is purely based on individuals and how well they perform. When you take this view, construction becomes, well, messy for lack of a better description.



For example, if the electrician is having a bad day and leaves a few cables out of the wall, it won't be until the end of the project that the problem becomes apparent. As much as we have all these elaborate business and quality control systems, ultimately it comes down to the individuals.

The real game of damages

No one wants to go back and re-do work; it's one thing to do a few repairs here and there, it's another when you are doing repair work every other day. On sites where damages keep happening, the moral drops significantly and not to mention the care and standards of workmanship.

As we deal in people, construction will never have a one size fits all answer to minimising damages and repairs. I think the volume of damages is an excellent measure of how each site has worked as a group of people.

Maybe it's not a game of keeping damages low, but a game of building respect and appreciation for the work that everyone is putting into the project.

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