

I am constantly amazed when procurement decisions are inappropriately impacted by an obsession with the dollar.....especially when it comes to decisions to hire a team to design a facility as specialized as a live fire training structure (LFTS), commonly called a burn building.

I have been reading construction plans (blueprints in the old days) since I was about 15 years old, working for my father who was a commercial general contractor in the Washington, DC suburbs. So I have studied thousands of construction documents, prepared by literally hundreds of architects and engineers, for over forty years. I know a nice set of plans when I see them; and I know lousy plans too. Too many lousy plans.

There are a ton of great conceptual designers out there. Only a few are really good at delivering a set of working drawings that adequately provides all the details required to support those great concepts. And trust me.....this is particularly evident in today's market.

A good set of plans clearly delineates all of the Work required to construct a facility that meets all of the operational, financial, and reasonably foreseeable objectives of the customer. The plans are clean, concise, very detailed, and, most importantly, complete! The structure is erected without delays associated with ambiguities, requests for information, and the expenses associated with the responses; change orders and those associated delays and expenses; and the inevitable compromises that are necessitated to just get it done.

A good contractor loves a good set of plans. A good contractor understands that a money maker is a project free of delays and, indeed, free of change orders. But remember, his job is to construct only what is on that set of plans. He will not likely have burn building experience, but he can succeed with a good set of plans.

In this economy, everyone is worried about the bottom line. Therefore, shortsighted procurement officers are immediately attracted to design proposals that are a couple percent less than others. We encourage them to heed this basic advice. Don't skimp trying to save a couple percent on the design fees that will dictate how the other 90% of the budget will be utilized; and that will dramatically impact the quality of your training for the next 20 years.

All of this is absolutely critical when it comes to a live fire training structure. These structures appear simple. They are NOT. These structures bend the rules. Typical construction details DO NOT WORK. I could go on and on, but will instead encourage you to at least scan the Burn Building Basics pamphlet in the download section of this website to get a feel for the unique complexities associated with a well designed LFTS.

Please.....pretty please, hire a designer who knows what questions to ask, what answers to expect, and what it takes to open your eyes to the possibilities that are available to you, encourage you to understand and envision what you need to meet

your training objectives, and to actually deliver a set of construction documents that says it all.