

CMs Missing Opportunity to Lead in Sustainable Design and Construction?



By the CMAA Sustainability Committee

While the LEED® Green Building Rating System has led the way for sustainable buildings and sites, all projects will soon have sustainable aspects; whether it is through the International Green Construction Code currently being developed by the ICC, or by requirements stipulated by jurisdictions in order to secure permits. Yet, based on an informal review of credentials posted by CMAA members, only approximately two percent of our Certified CMs are also LEED Accredited Professionals under the U.S. Green Building Council's program.

The CMAA Sustainability Committee has observed that our professional peers have been slow, if not reluctant, to grasp the knowledge and skill sets needed to sustain their role as the program and project leader when it comes to sustainable design and construction. Often they turn to LEED consultants to supplement their knowledge, or abstain from any real contribution in this area by placing the sustainable portion of the program completely in the hands of the design team. Either option means limiting the CM's positive impact on the project and depriving the owner and the project team of valuable input.

Today's owner is looking for a central manager of all aspects of their project. Without sufficient knowledge to manage a sustainable design and construction project, CMs are depriving themselves of an opportunity to offer comprehensive services with corresponding compensation, and they may be undermining the broad degree of expertise and competency expected from the program and project leaders

with the CCM designation. Failing to become fully conversant in the area of sustainability is no more acceptable to an owner than the CM failing to understand value engineering, scheduling or cost estimating.

Certainly, CMs can successfully oversee and manage areas of a project where we have limited knowledge and only tangential experience. But at the same time, all CMs typically have a depth of working knowledge in the underlying principles of nearly every aspect of the design and construction process. With such knowledge, we are equipped to address complex disciplines like structural and HVAC design, despite their highly technical nature. As CMs, have we demonstrated that same level of commitment and effort to equip ourselves to address sustainable principles?

Many CMs have successfully delivered sustainable projects with a modicum of knowledge, and this approach would be fine if sustainability were a rare occurrence or encountered on a once-in-a-career project. The fact is that more knowledge and practical experience in this area would more than likely have made a significant impact on the project that was delivered. You could have helped the owner make better choices by applying typical CM skills such as cost benefit analysis and life cycle costing to the LEED Check List quotient. And certainly having strong fundamentals in sustainable design and construction could ensure the right architect or engineer got the job because you would have been able to distinguish the difference between "green wash" and real skill and expertise in sustainable design.

When we are CM as Agent, we are often charged with charting the process and managing the program for the owner. Fully understanding the integration of sustainable design into construction is requisite if we are to set objectives, schedules, and budgets for a program that has sustainable aspects. We cannot successfully procure design professionals, write scopes of work, and interpret performances if we fail to have a working knowledge that is bolstered by an investment in actual experience.

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When we are CM at Risk, more skill and knowledge about the product type has proven to mitigate risk for you and the owner; sustainability is no exception. It also means you are bringing greater value to the table as the construction partner to the owner, while at the same time making your firm more competitive from a credentials standpoint, and often from a pricing standpoint.

Consider the fact that buildings in the United States “consume roughly 30% of our total energy and 60% of our electricity annually, while consuming five billion gallons of potable water. We also generate more than 2.5 pounds of waste for each square foot of building we deliver.”* And perhaps the most impressive statistic: “It is projected that \$60 billion will be spent on green buildings by 2013,” up from “\$12 Billion in 2008.”** These statistics demand your attention, not as environmentalists, but as constructors and managers of resources.

Practicing CMs and LEED Accredited Professionals have an opportunity to be on the forefront of emerging trends and technology. Despite the rapid growth and popularity of LEED projects, the market has only scratched the surface when it comes to creative thinking and meaningful solutions for sustainable design and construction. Process management expertise and organizational knowledge is in its infancy and lacks the sophistication that CCMs apply to all other areas of the Program and Project Management process. Largely, the whole of the market is still “painting by numbers” when it comes to sustainability, and few real artists have yet established themselves either in architecture, engineering, or Construction Management.

The CMAA Sustainability Committee encourages members to secure the necessary skills, knowledge, and experience in sustainable design and construction, and to become practicing LEED Accredited Professionals so that the Certified Construction Manager can remain the Project and Program Leader as sustainability further proliferates in the industry. [CM](#)

* USGBC V 2.0 Reference Guides 2006

** McGraw-Hill Construction, SmartMarket Trends Report 2008

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