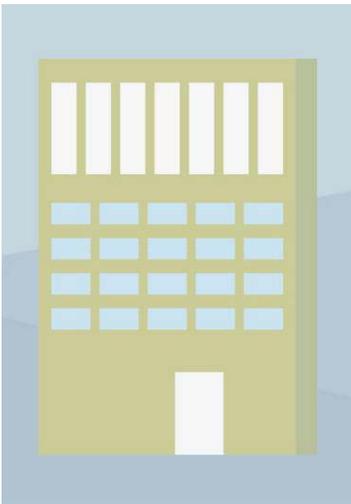


How To Get The Most Out of Working With Your Design Professional

SLD Staff



GET YOUR DESIGN PROFESSIONAL INVOLVED EARLY

They will be able to identify things you may have not thought about and provide valuable insight from an experienced perspective. They will be able to advise you on the feasibility of the project or assist with solutions to make it feasible.

Two examples are:

- Zoning of the property: The property might be located in what appears to be a commercial neighborhood but zoned only for residential construction so you could not build your business on that property without taking additional measures. A design professional will be able to advise you on how to apply to the Town or City for a Zoning Variance and about the cost, timeline, and likelihood of a favorable outcome of doing so.
- Soil condition or the history of the property: The soil might have low bearing capacity requiring additional structural considerations or the property might be contaminated requiring hazardous material mitigation and remediation. Both scenarios could have significant impact on the budget and the feasibility of the project. A design professional will bring up these concerns very early in the design process and help you understand the cost and time implications of dealing with them.

KNOW YOUR PROJECT GOALS

If you do not know where you are headed it will be very difficult to get there. Knowing your project goals before design starts and clearly communicating those goals to your design professional will help to keep your project on schedule and within budget. Try to think of your goals objectively, instead of “I want a large office” tell us “I need to hold meetings in my office; I need an area for a table that will seat 5 people and I have 10 filing cabinets I need to access daily.” Describing



what you need to do in the space is a very helpful compliment to how you imagine the space. Part of a design professional's job is to ask the right questions. Providing specific and objective rather than general feedback will help them to create solutions that will work for you. If all you have is a rough idea of the direction you want to go, work with your design professional to develop a detailed program with specific goals for the project. Prioritize your goals as part of the program. You can categorize program requirements based on Urgency and Importance. "Urgent and Important" goals have to be accomplished first, "Not Urgent and Not Important" can be tackled last, "Important but Not Urgent/Time Sensitive" and "Urgent/Time Sensitive but Not Important" goals fall somewhere in between. If you need to reign in the spending at some point, referring to a prioritized list of goals is the most practical way to do so.

FAMILIARIZE YOURSELF WITH THE PROCESS AND THE SERVICE

You may not have worked with a design professional before. Or, you may have worked with a different company or type of architect or engineer. Every design professional has their own process. Ask them what their process is. You are paying for the process and the service, not the product (you cannot send design services back if you don't like them, like a toaster), so do your due diligence by asking questions about the process before getting started. The design team will appreciate your interest; and, your understanding of how the design professional works will help keep your project running smoothly.

TRUST YOUR DESIGN PROFESSIONAL

The process of selecting the right design professional can be an arduous one but once you have found the right one, the process works best if you trust them. The design professional is the steward of your project. The prime consultant (typically the architect) will be the only one besides you who will be involved in every facet of the project from conception to completion. Trusting them means giving them enough freedom to creatively solve the creative that inevitably occur during a project. If you have checked references, visited other projects, and have developed a good rapport with your design professional, the fastest way to undermine that relationship is to second guess and micromanage them. Ask questions if you are concerned about something but be aware that decisions the design professional makes are very rarely capricious; they often have a code implication or other similar reasons behind them. We recommend against asking your design professional to explain so many decisions that you are in essence having them teach you the building code (or similar). They will not have carried the cost for significant explaining/teaching in their fee. And, it will not endear them to you to have them exceed their budget with an item that they cannot control such as your understanding of the building code. Trust me, they will appreciate your frustration trying to make sense of regulations such as the building code. Unfortunately, we often have to tell our clients that trying to bring logic to all the various regulatory requirements is futile. If you find that you don't trust that your design professional is correctly interpreting the code, you should consider

making a change or hiring a peer reviewer; but it will be nearly impossible to have a healthy collaborative process with them if you are constantly asking the design professional to justify their interpretations to you.

Always remember you are paying the design professional for their service and expertise. Be aware that termination clauses are inserted in the agreement to protect the design professional's as well as your interests. If they feel you do not trust them and that they are being unfairly asked to spend considerable time doing things outside their contractual scope of their services (to explain or prove their actions) they may exercise their clause to terminate your agreement. In most cases, if the design professional chooses to terminate the agreement all the work that they have prepared up to that point goes with them. So, if you know your personality is the type to question everything from medical procedures with your doctor to tax law with your accountant, you may want to consider discussing this with your design professional before you start. As the old auto garage sign states "Our Hourly Rate is \$1.00/HR or \$2.00/HR if you help".

PROVIDE FEEDBACK

When providing design feedback, focus on the 'what' more than the 'how'. Rather than indicating how you think that your designer should design the entrance canopy, give the objective criteria to meet or even an emotion or sense that you would like to evoke, something like "the entry really needs to be seen and stand out from as far away as the parking garage" or "make the entry feel inviting". Design professionals are great creative problem solvers. By providing feedback in this way, you allow your design professional to do what they do best; use their experience and creativity to design solutions. They may come up with exactly what you were thinking or they may design something that you like even better but would never have thought of.

Don't be afraid to tell your architect why you really don't like something. They would rather know that you hate any texture that looks like painted concrete block because it reminds you of your horrible 5th grade classroom. Most design professionals will not think that this is silly but rather appreciate that it will help keep them entirely away from suggesting anything similar which would create an undesirable response. They know that design is subjective and that some design components may evoke an unpleasant memory.

SET EXPECTATIONS FOR REVISIONS

Because a design process has many steps all building on previous ones, what might seem like a small change may impact the rest of the design and could spell big money in terms of the time required to make revisions. Once you've reached a point in the creative process where you feel the project will fulfill the goals it set out to achieve, approve the content. It's easy to get caught up in trying to improve just one more thing, but this could spell disaster for your budget. Work with your design professional to figure out a practical number of revisions. This will create achievable expectations for you and your design professional and help to save money, time and sanity. This does not mean changes cannot be made beyond the set number of revisions. A valid epiphany which adds value to the design has its own merits. Just be prepared to compensate the design professional commensurate with the requested changes. Agreement on compensation for "additional services" should be part of setting the expectations for revisions.

AVOID DESIGN BY COMMITTEE WHENEVER YOU CAN

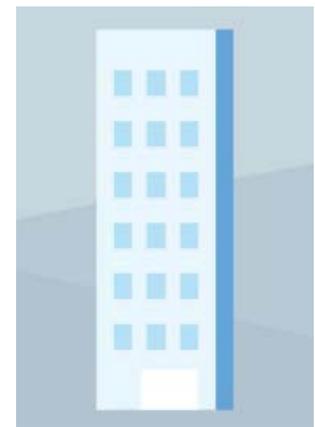
Understand the limitations of wanting to cater to everyone's design sensibilities and requirements. Design is very subjective so opinions can range widely within even the smallest of groups. There is always the danger of strong

personalities superseding logical program needs when there are many people there are involved in the design and approval process. If you can, avoid having more than 2-3 people involved in the actual design process. If it is unavoidable, appoint a designated spokesperson and a feedback filter with veto powers. If such an arrangement is not possible, defaulting to the design professional's creative judgement is one way to stay the course.

Whether it is a committee member or your design professional, the most important thing to have to keep the project on course and on schedule is a clear decision maker. Do not assume that all the stake holders have all the facts required to make an informed design decision. The decision maker must either be the feedback filter or be kept informed of all the facts. The decision maker should not ignore the stake holders but ensure that the feedback provided by them is informed and shaped into something that is of use to the design professional.

If the design becomes entirely a group decision there is a serious risk that the decisions become so focused on being something that nobody in the group dislikes that the design winds up being something that nobody actually really likes either. Design by committee becomes design by compromise and the resultant project in an effort to be inoffensive winds up bland at best and not meeting the project objectives at worst.

Most of these recommendations all boil down to planning for effective communication. A design professional's job is at its core all about communication (talking, writing, and drawing). The more you can define your expectations and think critically throughout the process about how communication will be handled the more successful your project will be.



*This information was written by Spring Line Design Architecture + Engineering to help inform the decisions surrounding architecture and structural engineering services encountered by start-up businesses. **Please share!***

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