

Coaching the Building Team

by Dave Holbrook

As a builder, you may not be subjected to job performance evaluations within your company, but how do you think you rate in the category “Works well with others”? Considering that trade contractors are an indispensable part of the homebuilding business, it makes sense to give your trade relationships a health check. It’s not all about you, especially in a market troubled by labor shortages, and especially if your trade contractor is more organized than you are. *Building Partnerships: How to Work with Trade Contractors* by Bob Whitten (1999, Home Builder Press, 1201 15th Street, NW, Washington, DC 20005; 800/223-2665; www.BuilderBooks.com; \$29) takes a look at the issues and practical concerns of getting the job done to everyone’s satisfaction. How do you prevent a trade contractor’s schedule from controlling your own? Well, maybe you don’t entirely. This book doesn’t present easy answers to difficult questions, but examines the circumstances and draws on experience to suggest methods of coping and cooperation, with the goal of working as a team. There’s a lot of savvy advice in this book to be profitably followed or ignored at your own risk.



- “Provide a capillary break and appropriate resistance to moisture diffusion.”
- “Ensure good site drainage away from the slab.”
- “Provide a minimum of 100 mm (4 in.) of coarse, clean granular fill below the slab-on-ground. This base will restrict capillary wicking of soil moisture and allow for depressurization below the slab to remove soil gases in areas where they might pose a problem.”
- “Provide a moisture barrier under the floor slabs to prevent moisture movement through the slabs. Polyethylene (0.15 mm [6 mil]) is commonly used.”

That’s it. There’s a lot of good information here, but only superficial prescriptions provided to correct the problems. Does the moisture barrier go under or over the clean, granular fill? Should those weird gases be vented? Many materials are “commonly used,” but what’s best? Neither the text nor the line-drawing illustrations that accompany each description make the details clear.



Constructively speaking, this book would have to be enlarged to a multi-volume set to provide the necessary scope. Instead, additional reading sources are listed at the end of each chapter. Building better and improving your own procedures will always be a matter of doing the research and applying the knowledge. Toward that end, this book is a decent bibliographical resource and starting place.

Problems and Solutions in Brief

One of the doggone problems with homebuilding is that there’s more to it than meets the eye — a lot more. In fact, it’s the hidden problems that present the biggest challenges. *Building Solutions: A Problem Solving Guide for Builders and Renovators* (1998, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, P.O. Box 35005, Stn. BRM B, Toronto, ON M7Y 6E5; 613/748-2003; www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca; Cdn. \$35) goes inside the essential, disparate systems that make up a house, looking in turn at the potential problems and possible solutions for each one. The six-chapter book covers foundations, floor systems, wall systems, roof and ceiling systems, indoor air quality and ventilation, and noise control. Of necessity, both problems and solutions are edited for brevity, so what you get is a general overview of some common building conditions. Take, for example, the problem, “Damp or wet floor slab.” The cause given is “Moisture migration up through the slab.” The solutions are:

Look, Ma, I’m a GC

I know, they want to sell books to the adventurous and unskilled, but to suggest that contracting your own home will save you lots of money, and that a professional builder “can never do as accurate an assessment of your needs as you can” is an ill-considered statement to stick in the lead page of a book titled *Contracting Details: A do-it-yourself con-*

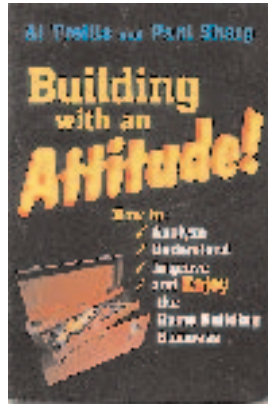


struction schedule and homebuilding handbook by Scott Watson and Sheila Hollihan Elliot (1999, Baine Books, P.O. Box 892, East Troy, WI 53120; 877/642-3390; www.BaineBooks.com; \$20). Watson is a 23-year veteran who should know better than to take the cheap shot, dismissing a General Contractor's margin as just so much gravy that a one-time homebuilder can knock right off the top (strike a nerve, or what?). Pull the intro, though, and you've got a somewhat useful book, especially if you're the disorganized genius type not uncommon to the trade.

From the summary overview of a GC's role to the practical progressive sequence and necessary planning involved in home construction, the authors present an organized and detailed concept of the process. For \$20, you can lend this book to a skeptical client as an insider's perspective on the construction schedule and a subtle hint that this is a real and difficult job.

Attitude Adjustment

All right, this one's written for you. *Building with an Attitude! How to: Analyze, Understand, Improve, and Enjoy the Home Building Business* by Al Trellis and Paul Sharp (1999, Home Builder Press, 1201 15th St. NW, Washington, DC 20005; 800/223-2665; www.BuilderBooks.com; \$20) explores the invaluable link between attitude and success. Sure, this is a self-help book of sorts, but I like the gathering of insights, some of which you may already have without having articulated them. Presented here in a cohesive, business-oriented format, the principles and accumulated wisdom could help you stay on track, or get back on. The authors founded Home Builders Network, which provides consulting and information for small volume builders. They built the Network on their own attitude that "Building homes should be fun and profitable." I can't argue with any of that.



FREE & CHEAP

A free *Interactive Dimensional Lighting* CD lets you check out lighting applications and see the effects for yourself, room by room. A .jpeg product library provides photographs of all the fixtures demonstrated.

Contact: Progress Lighting, P.O. Box 5704, Spartanburg, SC 29303; 864/599-6000; www.progresslighting.com.

The *Swan Video Collection* offers eight free instructional videos for the installation and handling of solid-surface showerwalls, countertops, and 1/4-inch materials. Check them all out, including "Working with Swanstone Molded Countertops" (38 minutes) and "Working with Swanstone 1/4-inch Sheets" (56 minutes).

Contact: The Swan Corporation, One City Centre, Suite 2300, St. Louis, MO 63101; 800/325-7008; www.theswancorp.com.

Decks and porches constitute a surprisingly large slice of the new construction pie. For \$5, get the lowdown on building *Southern Pine Porches*, a 13-minute product and technique video. Topics covered include material selection, installation, and the care and feeding of your new pressure-treated SYP porch.

Contact: Southern Pine Council, P.O. Box 641700, Kenner, LA 70064; 504/443-4464; www.southernpine.com.

The 60-page *Western Classic Glulam Design Guide* for working with glue-laminated engineered lumber provides solid-sawn substitution tables, design stress and property tables, drilling guidelines, span guides, and more. It's free through Willamette E-Z Frame distributors.

Contact: Willamette Industries, 1300 SW Fifth Ave., Portland, OR 97201; 888/650-6332; www.wii.com.