

## Hyper-Fast Delivery

### United States Army Corps of Engineers – Sherman Alternate Care Facility

Would you like to be part of a team that delivered a 274 bed, 100,000GSF healthcare renovation in 25 days with no onsite accidents, 4% earlier than expected, no RFIs and 9% under budget? What if I told you that this team had resolved all punch list items and all closeout documents were turned over on the date of substantial completion; and the Owner was so impressed they recognized every team member individually for their efforts?

What if I told you this was done in April 2020 at the beginning of the COVID-19 Pandemic and we were able to implement a daily screening process for all onsite staff and that we had no recorded COVID cases. We did not have the as-builts for the space we were supposed to renovate until the first day of the project. We did not receive the Owner's requirements until halfway through the project and that the project was being designed and built at the same time.

It might sound stressful and chaotic, and it was, but several people on the team talked about 'withdrawal' in the days immediately after completion because we had become so used to the closeness and team dynamic that it was hard to be without it. It was far from perfect, but every person on the team was professional, focused, and determined and we exceeded everyone's expectations when it was all over.

In late March there was a rapid increase in the number and severity of people infected with the virus and there was a real fear that we would not have sufficient healthcare facilities to deal with everyone infected, giving rise to the need for alternate care facilities (ACF's) in targeted areas across the country.

Our ACF site was a 250,000GSF outpatient facility that had been largely abandoned for the previous 10 years and it was a mess. There was garbage everywhere, water damage, asbestos, mold, and we weren't even sure the existing elevators and building systems would function. Despite the disaster we inherited we were able to deliver all of the operational requirements and 9 more beds than the 265-bed target.

Maybe the most remarkable thing is that, despite the obstacles, stress, and exhausting pace we all thought, "That was crazy! But I would love to work with that team again." That reality is what led us here. How can we help others apply what we learned to any project and recreate the conditions that allowed us to do great things? We found 6 things that were key to our success.

#### **MOTIVATION**

What we did: The mission, "Save lives by delivering as many beds as possible in the shortest time possible" was the clear motivator for our team. The critical work we were doing kept the team focused, engaged and willing to deal with hardship and allowed us to be tolerant of missteps and open minded in addressing challenges.

What you can do: Every project is built for a reason. Define a clear motive and share it with the entire team. Post it for everyone to see, repeat it often and create that sense of purpose. That purpose will focus the team when things get tough.

#### **LEADERSHIP**

What we did: At the beginning each party took ownership by identifying their leadership team, clearly defining each leader's role and communicating that to everyone working on the project. We all knew who to direct questions to, who was responsible for different aspects of the work and who was empowered to make decisions. So, when questions arose, decisions could be made quickly and decisively to keep the work moving forward. The team leaders had the ability,

confidence and authority to make decisions while keeping the project requirements in mind: finish on time; stay under budget; and meet the changing Owner criteria.

What you can do: Clearly identify the leadership team, their roles, and their responsibilities. Make sure the entire team knows who is empowered to make decisions. Establish ground rules around decision making so everyone knows the players, the process and the parameters.

## **APPRECIATION**

What we did: We were working under immense pressure, we were risking our health and safety and the pace was relentless. Under these conditions, it felt natural to go out of your way to thank people and acknowledge their sacrifices. We provided lunches and dinners for the tradespeople and staff. We provided t-shirts and hats for the people involved. The Owner presented certificates of appreciation to the staff, and the community even baked treats and dropped them off at the jobsite for everyone. And as much as anything, we said, 'Thanks' to one another, a lot. Simple acts of appreciation motivate and inspire people to do their best.

What you can do: Take the time to recognize every member of the team regularly for their efforts. Be specific and sincere. Create an appreciation program for the project that recognizes everyone's efforts. The impact a meal or t-shirt has on morale and good will cannot be overestimated.

## **TRUST**

What we did: Our team was thrown together quickly. A few of the project leaders had worked together in the past and had built strong, trusting relationships. The respect and trust was on display from the first day, set the tone for the entire project and quickly spread to the rest of the team. This usually takes months but, like everything on this project, was compressed and trust built quickly among the rest of the team as each person delivered on their promises daily.

What you can do: Build a leadership team that trusts one another by creating an environment where people feel safe to make promises and accept responsibility when they make a mistake. The quickest way to build trust is to make promises and keep them. This creates an environment of ownership and responsibility, and helps shift the culture from one of "holding people accountable" to a culture of "being responsible." Agree, as a team, to the meaning of being responsible and hold people to that standard. If you make a mistake, own it! Do not deflect or play the victim. Finally, do not attack people that make mistakes. Seek to understand what happened and how you can work together to prevent this from happening again. Develop an environment where everyone is comfortable speaking up when they see a problem and remember that everyone has a role to play in making this happen.

## **COMMUNICATION**

What we did: Because design, construction and project conditions were constantly changing, the entire team erred on the side of over communication, and using every available medium: e-mail, text, phone, instant message and in-person. The inclination to over communicate kept everyone informed but did cause confusion and made knowing what was current difficult. There were, however, some constants that brought clarity: morning staff huddles kept staff focused for the day and up-to-date on current design documents; mid-day project meetings apprised the Owner of the status of design and construction; afternoon field huddles with superintendents and foremen set the stage for third shift work; late-night design team check-ins updated design status and set goals for the following day. This multitude of communications contributed to our ability to make decisions, anticipate coming obstacles and course-correct in the field.

What you can do: As early as possible, create a communication plan. Define how you will share information and when you will use the various forms of communication at your disposal.

Determine what meetings are needed along with who will be there, the expected outcomes of those meetings, and the ground rules. Don't make assumptions about how communication will happen and be sure to take the time to establish clear expectations.

## **ADAPTATION**

**What we did:** Time was of the essence and everyone knew it, so we held to a "Plan, Do, Check, Adjust" approach to the work. The team had a willingness to explore multiple options and our approach allowed us all to adjust to the challenges that emerged. Every team member was willing to pivot as information came to light and as the resulting decisions were made.

A few days into the project, it became clear that the design team would need to be on site every day to adapt the design to existing and unforeseen conditions. Similarly, regular Owner presence on site was necessary to help with inspections, reviews, and decision making. Turner brought staff from out of state and utilized national resources to expedite work and provide expertise as the project evolved. Aside from a few inviolate issues (schedule, budget, bed count and life safety), every option was on the table for this project.

**What you can do:** Create a Plan, Do, Check, Adjust approach that will allow your team to push the boundaries. Put everything on the table, only hold your ground on what really matters and communicate those non-negotiables to your team. Create an environment where the first answer is, "yes" or "yes if..." and "no" isn't the first answer when someone tries something new.

This was, undeniably, a tough, intense and stressful project; but for the team, it was the most personally and professionally fulfilling project we have worked on. The sense of community, friendship and personal connection to the entire team is something that none of us had experienced before. There was trust and the solidarity born out of commitment to the mission, shared sacrifice and personal risk that allowed all of us to set aside our normal 'positions' and ways of working to deliver the impossible.

If you want to learn more, please feel free to reach out to Mark Walsh at [mark.walsh@perkinswill.com](mailto:mark.walsh@perkinswill.com) or Brad Booker at [bbooker@tcco.com](mailto:bbooker@tcco.com).



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