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# ***Building Relationships That Increase Profits!***

*(by Alan Sparkman)*



Concrete contractors require concrete to do their job - no surprise there. There are lots of ready mix companies to choose from and most of them would be happy to sell you concrete. The **question** for you, the **concrete contractor**, is “how do I **choose** a **ready mix** company that helps me increase **profits**”. *Continue >*





Many contractors select their suppliers based only on price – the cheapest price gets the job. There is a lot of apparent wisdom in that strategy, but apparent wisdom usually obscures a lot of hidden costs. Right about now, many of you are getting ready to leave this guide in disgust and I can predict what you are saying: “The only thing that matters in the real world is price! If you don’t use the cheapest bid you won’t get the job.”

## ***What could be more important than thoughtfully selecting the one vendor that has the most influence on your success or failure as a concrete contractor?***

So, before you leave, I challenge you to answer this question honestly: Do you buy your tools at Wal-Mart? Or how about this. Pick your favorite pastime or recreation and tell me if you buy the cheapest or the best equipment for yourself. If you shop for tools at Wal-Mart and always buy the cheapest stuff no matter what, it will definitely be a waste of your time to read the rest of this guide. But if you will admit that you don’t always buy based on price alone, especially for the things you consider important, you might want to consider reading a little further. After all, what could be more important than thoughtfully selecting the one vendor that has the most influence on your success or failure as a concrete contractor?





## Consistent Culture

As other Sherpas have noted, it's important to focus on work that plays to your strengths (and you might also want to read [Marcus Buckingham's book \*Now, Discover Your Strengths\*](#)) in order to maximize your profit potential. The same is true for selecting your suppliers and subcontractors and especially your ready mix supplier. For example, if your strength is placing large, high-volume slabs you need to look for a supplier who also likes to supply that type of work and who has a proven track record of doing so. But, if you are a decorative contractor who only places a few loads a day you probably want to look for a different supplier. The big supplier may regard you as a nuisance, probably won't understand your need for individualized attention and will be annoyed when you request non-standard mix designs. This type of matching is sometimes referred to as 'cultural fit' – both you and your supplier value similar types of work. This is a good foundation on which to build a relationship that is profitable for both parties. So the first thing to look for is a Consistent Culture.

## Organized Operation

Whether you are placing 200 cubic yards per hour for a superflat floor, or 8 cubic yards a day for decorative concrete you want to look for a supplier who is organized in their operation and able to meet your scheduling requirements. A well-organized operation is (nearly) always a sign that the people in the organization know the value of time and resources and dislike wasting either one. Usually that means they understand the value of timely deliveries (and it also likely means they will want accurate estimates from you with regard to how long your pour will take!) Keep in mind that suppliers invariably have other customers who also want their concrete delivered on time and they need to know when to expect their trucks back for the next round.





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A well-organized supplier is also much less likely to make mistakes with the mix and other materials you order. Organized people pay attention to detail and understand that getting all the little things right lead to projects done on time and in a satisfactory manner. After all, how much does it cost you in crew time and wasted effort when the truck shows up with the wrong mix, or the driver forgets to bring the ‘extras’ you requested?

So what are the signs of an organized ready mix supplier? For starters, look for clean trucks, well-maintained plants, organized stockpiles, driver’s that are neatly dressed and delivery tickets that are clear and mistake-free. More importantly, evaluate their track record of timely deliveries and accurate orders since that’s ultimately what matters most to you.

### **Accommodating Attitude**

Anyone who has spent any time in the construction industry knows that the best laid plans often go awry. Look for a ready mix supplier who understands this and makes a reasonable effort to accommodate your changing circumstances. That’s not to say you have a free pass to be unorganized and always making last minute changes, but you need to find a supplier who genuinely wants to work with you to meet the changing demands so often found on construction projects. So look for a supplier who genuinely wants to serve your needs, not just sell you concrete. Accommodators usually are the ones who look for solutions to problems first instead of trying to assign blame or responsibility – their salespeople may be the ones who grab the chute or an extra rake to help you place the concrete when you are running behind, and their drivers are usually willing to make an extra effort to spot the truck where it makes your job easier instead of making the driver’s life easier.





[For more from  
Steven Covey  
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## Cool Communicator

If you are really interested in improving yourself and your concrete operation, you have probably heard lots of advice about communication. Truth is, good communication is essential to good relationships, be they personal or business. Many of us in the construction industry are ‘communication challenged’ – we are handicapped when it comes to making ourselves understood and especially when it comes to understanding others. Steven Covey observed that we should seek first to understand, and then to be understood.

***Problems and frustrations for both you and the supplier will be eliminated if both parties know issues and opportunities in advance and can plan accordingly.***

So ask yourself if your concrete supplier exhibits this trait – do their salespeople or dispatchers really try to understand what you need for a specific job, or do they rush to get you off the phone so they can move on to the next customer? If they ask lots of questions, that’s a good indicator they are really trying to understand what you need in order to serve your needs more effectively. So, take the time to answer their questions (truthfully!) and you might be surprised at how your service will improve.

The ability to be a ‘cool communicator’ is probably most valuable when dealing with a problem. You want a supplier who works with you to find a solution, not one who gets red-faced and argumentative. Cool communicators are a lot like Accommodators – they work on solutions instead of trying to assign blame. As a result, they are valuable partners to have when things don’t go as planned.





More importantly, good communication will eliminate or at least reduce many of the problem situations that plague construction jobs. For example, if you have been pumping the slabs on a particular job and the upcoming pour is going to be unloaded directly from the truck chutes, there is a good chance that your placement rate will change and the truck spacing will need to be modified. Problems and frustrations for both you and the supplier will be eliminated if both parties know this in advance and can plan accordingly.

***Ultimately, the effective use of new innovations goes back to good communication. Don't hesitate to share with your supplier what you would really like to see in terms of mix performance – workability, slump, set time, bleeding, etc.***

### Intrepid Innovator

As a contractor, your expertise is placing concrete. As the manufacturer of the concrete, your supplier should serve as your technical adviser about advances in mix design that will help you work more effectively. If your supplier resists trying anything new, or if they never bring you ideas about how new materials and technologies could benefit your concrete placement operations it might be time to look for a new supplier. Of course, this needs to be balanced with the supplier who wants to try something new on every job, but there are advantages to both contractors and suppliers who make effective use of modern concrete technology to improve quality and reduce costs.





Ultimately, the effective use of new innovations goes back to good communication. Don't hesitate to share with your supplier what you would really like to see in terms of mix performance – workability, slump, set time, bleeding, etc. Usually, a good supplier will be able to work with you (and actually happy to do so!) to design a mix that fits the way your crew works. In the end, this is better for the supplier because they have a more satisfied customer and it is better for you because your operation will work more smoothly, and hopefully, more profitably.

## **Final Thoughts**

Don't forget that good suppliers are looking for good customers. And the list they will be using to evaluate the contractors they would prefer to work with is remarkably similar to the one provided above. So if you really want to improve your relationship with your ready mix supplier, apply the principles in this article to your own operation as well as to your potential suppliers.





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## SUMMIT DATE

This document reached the summit (was created) on February 4, 2005 and is based on the best information available to the Sherpa at that time. To check for updates please click here <http://www.ConcreteSherpa.com/readymix>.

## NAVIGATION & USER TIPS

You can move around this guide by using your mouse or keyboard arrows. Left mouse button goes to the next page, right mouse button goes to previous page. Click on the right arrow ( → ) for the next page and the left arrow ( ← ) to go the previous page.

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## ABOUT THE CONCRETE SHERPA

The Concrete Sherpa is a team of people that represent the experience, teaching and learning of our team members and other industry leaders *on a mission to make life better for the concrete contractor*. We are an idea center striving to deliver thought provoking ideas based on “Concrete Advice for Business and Life” to stimulate you to reach new heights. As a user, you should remember to consider all information you receive, here at the Concrete Sherpa or elsewhere, not as a *cast in concrete* recommendation, but rather as an idea for you to consider and ponder.



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### THE JOURNEY LEADING TO THE CONCRETE SHERPA PROJECT

The Concrete Sherpa Project (A [Sherpa](#) is a “guide”) was born at The Concrete Network in mid 2004. Here is how it happened:

The biggest surprise, or gift, since starting The Concrete Network in 1999 has been the concrete contractor friends from around the country we’ve made and witnessing the passion they have for what they do. These people include Dave Pettigrew, up in the San Francisco Bay Area, or the Verlennich brothers in Minnesota, or Bob Harris in Georgia, the list goes on and on. It’s quite inspiring.

We were once asked, “How are you so excited every day about concrete?” Well the answer is simple, it is impossible to not be excited about concrete when you have the job we do—interacting with hundreds of concrete contractors from every state in the country.

The thing we’ve learned about concrete contractors is that most are passionate *craftsmen*—they are often less passionate and experienced in the “office stuff”. Human nature channels us to do what we are most comfortable with; learning how to use a new saw-cutting tool is comfortable; learning and implementing a new estimating strategy, or job management tool, is not so comfortable.





## *Sherpa info*

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### THE JOURNEY CONTINUES...

So Sherpa was born to provide FREE and easy to use information on topics many contractors are not too comfortable with.

- Concrete Sherpa is here to provide help to contractors who are often 'Lone Rangers' and don't have anyone to get solid business advice from.
- Concrete Sherpa is here to provide help for contractors who have to work too hard and too many hours in their business, and one day realize they need to work *on their business, not in their business*.
- Have fun with Concrete Sherpa and go faster towards reaching success than you might have on your own.
- To skeptics who think something free can't be valuable, or there must be a trick- visit Concrete Sherpa and decide for yourself.

We hope you make great use of the Concrete Sherpa and it helps you to become an awesome success for yourself, your family, your church, and your community.

### VISIT THE CONCRETE SHERPA

To visit the Concrete Sherpa click here <http://www.ConcreteSherpa.com>.

