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American Resort Development Association

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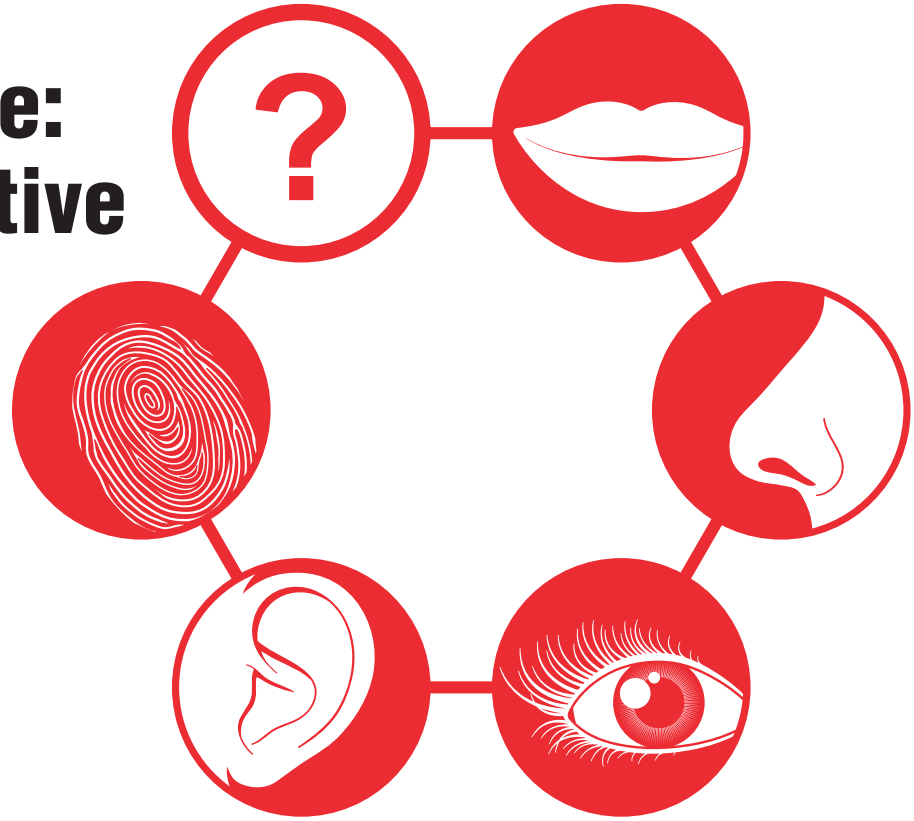
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It Makes Sense: The Collaborative Approach

BY JAVED BHAGHANI



In the hospitality business, we strive to create great experiences.

Creating a hospitality environment that fits the needs of guests, owners, members, developers, homeowners' associations, resort managers, and operators is achievable. It takes collaboration.

We have found that our approach for the last 10 years works—we call it "integrated project management." This is our mantra, and we use a "sixth" sense approach for clients that embraces the collaborative approach to furniture production. Of course, it can be implemented within any silo in the world of construction and design.

When we started our company (a manufacturer of furniture, custom case goods, and soft seating for the hospitality industry), we realized very quickly a need to improve communication throughout the whole project lifecycle between all the stakeholders from the get-go. Instead of the traditional models of linear communication that can have "translation breakdowns," we encourage and elicit participation from owners, architects, general contractors, designers, engineers, housekeepers, and even other suppliers. Our thought process was that if we were on the same page from the beginning, it would simplify matters and produce cost-effective results.

Everyone wants the lowest price. We certainly can make sure that budgetary considerations are primary. However, lowest price does not necessarily mean best "value". We think of ourselves as team players. This is why we aim to get involved at the very beginning of the process.

Everyone should be at the table when budget, design, and operations are being discussed. This way, problems can be solved before they even arise. When all participants are involved throughout the lifecycle of a project, open and fluid communications can ensure that a project runs smoothly and efficiently from start to finish. We cannot catch everything, but "together" we can catch most things.

Let's break down the collaborative process into six senses—for just a tad of ESP is truly what pulls the entire project together.

Sense of Sight

In design, the sense of sight is the starting point. Where the developer might be looking at a budget that fits his investors, the architect may be seeing a luxury resort with the style and flair that will bring accolades and preserve his/her place in the archives of creative history.

The general contractor looks at the blueprints from a different perspective. He sees hiring a crew, planning logistics, and ensuring that his work is organized, responsive, and timely. And then there are the interior designers, who perhaps see snazzy fabrics and vibrant colors as part of their mission. Let's not forget the folks who will have boots on the ground—the managers who see the logistics of vacuuming under a low chair, replacing a lamp at a later date, or installing a headboard that bangs against a common wall at inopportune moments.

And last but not least, a furniture manufacturer who sees and produces many designs that have been used in countless timeshare rooms! Our "insight" can be tapped to help define what works (and what may not) to ensure long-term beautiful furniture.

Sense of Touch

In the timeshare world, we share a special gift: making a member or owner feel at home while on vacation. And it is through this collaborative process that the result can be achieved. As long as we each have beginning-to-end involvement in the process, the result will be a seamless product that pleases

us all while satisfying the needs of the needs of a resort's guests and/or owners.

In our case for example, we believe our products are made for the end user. Who is that? The guest, of course. After a full day of fun, they drop into a lounge chair or stretch out on a comfy couch, the *feel* of the environment will become a memorable impression.

Sense of Hearing

Listening. What a concept! If all of the stakeholders in the creative process actually hear what we are each saying instead of talking at each other, imagine the strength of final product. The creative process is by nature collaborative and when the development team listens to each other and is willing to make adjustments based on expert information, the dialog becomes innovative and solutions oriented, instead of combative and non-productive.

Sense of Smell

We all know when something smells fishy. In contrast, the honesty and integrity brought to the collaborative process delivers quality goods that are solid and consistently serve the client's needs. For instance, taking design and ensuring longevity. This can be solved at the initial collaboration table.

Take for instance, a headboard that is upholstered: what happens if it gets soiled or damaged? Should it be replaced, or should we as manufacturers suggest a way to make the panels removable? Taking a breath and pausing to include input from various sources produces win-win, long-term visions with easy collaborative solutions.

The better alternative is when the team is anchored with a focus on results and the bottom line as a group. Then, instead of smelling something rotten, this collective effort produces the "sweet scent of success."

Sense of Taste

Nothing tastes as sweet as a job well done. This approach of open communication between the suppliers, designers, builders and owners is the perfect recipe to create that essence of good taste, no matter what the budget.

The Sixth Sense

Your ESP can be a USP: The **U**nique **S**elling **P**roposition you bring to the table. Along with your colleagues, you can anticipate the needs of your clients and the end-users of guests, members and owners. You can listen to objections and find common solutions. With an open mind, you can interpret what others are struggling with and discover ways you can help them reach a beneficial outcome. You can grapple with challenges which may end up as opportunities.

All of these senses can come into play to produce a team approach to getting a job done which saves time and money, and produces a product in which everyone can take pride.

The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result. Try something different: collaboration! ■

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