

# WARNER'S CORNER

## RESPECT



JAMES WARNER

I've always marveled at the huge variation in people and the different values and personalities they possess. When we look at mankind as a whole, most people are decent and tolerant of others, but there are always those who are less than model citizens. Some are full of arrogance and always critical, others can be downright dishonest, and some are even crooks. As a child, I received a very sage bit of advice from a wise old man I occasionally worked for (helped): "Be respectful of others." I would add one more that has served me well: "Try to fit in with those you are with."

Much of my success has resulted from conversations with construction tradesmen and laborers. Yes, these people have knowledge too! And they know more about how things are built than any others; after all, it is they who actually build. In troubleshooting distressed projects, I have often found information from the site workers to be invaluable. To fit in with the group, it is best to dress in work clothes with a well-splattered hard hat. Unfortunately, when visiting projects, we must be "well groomed" (wearing clean clothes) to impress the client; this is not a good way to deal with the workers, however. Though hard on clothing, getting splattered with concrete or mud often breaks the ice and opens the door for valuable communication.

I remember well a case where I was credited with "saving" a project. It was a huge structure, but construction had been suspended due to massive honeycomb defects on the sides and soffit of some primary girders. As it turned out, spacing between individual reinforcing bars was less than the size of the concrete aggregate. In fact, the reinforcing steel was so congested that inspection beyond it was short of impossible. Many experts had been retained, meetings held, and opinions opined, but the cause and scope of the problem remained a mystery. A simple

respectful chat with two laborers—the only working hands left on the idled project—told me exactly what had occurred during concrete placement and, most importantly, that someone had taken photos showing it all.

Armed with this knowledge, I took my seat at a meeting, and what a meeting it was! Flip charts and oral presentations worthy of Harvard MBAs were presented. An album of photos was passed up and down the table. It contained pictures of everything, except the workers separating the top reinforcing steel with sledge hammers to allow concrete placement and vibrator insertion. I insisted on reviewing all pictures taken the day of the placement and, after much resistance, the photographer was called to bring them in. And, yes, just as the laborers had said, some photos showed that improper placement and consolidation of the concrete inside the reinforcing had occurred. Following a few confirming cores, repairs were made and the structure was completed.

Certainly erroneous, the client proclaimed me a genius. Yet all I had done was talk to his laborers, something he or any of the other consultants who preceded me to the site could have done—and at huge cost savings.

The true professional shows respect for others, regardless of background, culture, or station in life. Let us all be true professionals!

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*James Warner, PE, is an independent Consulting Engineer specializing in foundation and structural restoration and repair. Formerly a contractor in these specialties, he organized the original concrete repair program for World of Concrete and presented those seminars for 19 years. It was at one of his seminars that the seeds were sown for what is now the International Concrete Repair Institute (ICRI). He continues an active consultancy and is an Honorary Life Member of the Institute.*