

# EXECUTING QUALITY IMPROVEMENTS CORRECTLY

YOU MAY ASK **WHY** A CHANGE IS BEING MADE, BUT THE BIGGER (AND BETTER) QUESTION IS **HOW** TO GET IT RIGHT

BY ANDREW SHIPP

Anyone who has worked construction has experienced the rising stress level and faster heart rate caused by a change—whether in product, material, or system—coming to the jobsite.

That was certainly the case for me when I was a construction manager in the field. Any change, large or small, ignites anxiety and raises questions—often in colorful language I can’t use here—about why the change is being made (when things are working just fine!) and whether the decision-makers understand the amount of extra work the change will require.

But changes are inevitable in home construction and the best builders and their field teams understand the importance of having the right methods and mindset to successfully implement them.

## WHY CHANGE OFTEN FAILS

As a leader, the last thing you want is for your team to dread change, especially when the change will improve the quality of your homes.

First, work to understand the “why” behind their resistance. In my experience working with builders on the journey to improve quality, I’ve narrowed it down to these roadblocks:

1. Most people are wired to resist change. It’s disruptive, unsettling, requires learning new things, and often does not present an obvious benefit.
2. There’s usually a bad taste lingering from previously unsuccessful changes that caused confusion and wasted time or led



Communication and on-site training are the keys to ensuring a change in product, material, or system is executed correctly. Also, set, communicate, and inspect quality standards for the upgrade and make documentation easily available for reference.

to installation issues, callbacks, rework, and warranty service, not to mention stressed teammates, angered trades, and upset homeowners.

3. A poorly managed change almost always lacks proper planning, communication, and training.

Too often I see purchasing, architecture, sales, trades, and site managers left out of the decision-making process, despite the fact that changes will affect all of them.

With that, the Nike-like mentality of “Just Do It” is much harder (and often

foolhardy and resented) in our profession.

The sad truth is that while intentions may be good, the poor execution of a change derails any optimism the next time you try something new.

## HOW CHANGE SUCCEEDS

Employ the George Costanza principle from the sitcom *Seinfeld*: If you’re not getting what you want, do the opposite.

So, to successfully implement a change, you would:

**Involve the trades.** The pushback I often

hear from leadership about involving trade partners in the decision to make a change is that trades will simply suggest no change is necessary. But in reality, trades offer valuable, often overlooked insights that almost surely improve not only the proposed change but also ensure its successful implementation. Not to mention, you'll need agreement on pricing and scopes of work if the idea is going to survive and thrive.

If you refer to your trades as “partners,” are you truly respecting that role if you don't ask for their input? In fact, you *need* their buy-in and should *want* to hear from them early to inform decision-making.

Also, don't limit input to only the trade (or trades) that will be directly affected by

relevant and do they accurately reflect the change? Have any redlined CDs been sent to or accepted by the trades? Are purchase orders updated in the company's payment software program?

**Sales:** Are sales associates trained to answer customer questions about the change? Have options sheets been updated to ensure that sales conversations will be correct and accurate?

**Construction operations:** Does the team have the necessary information to correctly deploy changes to the field team? Has management verified that others in the company are properly informed, prepared, and ready to go? Have installation details been shared?

methods than directly from the source! Many manufacturers offer such training for free to ensure proper and successful installations, encourage continued use of their product, and reduce their liability.

## **OTHER TACTICS TO ENSURE SUCCESS**

If the change is significant enough, consider building a mock-up on site to show what the change should look like when properly installed. For example, if you're changing from a standard housewrap as your drainage plane to using structural insulated sheathing panels, this can affect not only how the drainage plane is installed but also how windows, doors, and claddings



When introducing a specification change, engage the manufacturer to provide on-site instruction and documentation.

the proposed change. Include others that may have a smaller stake in making it successful. Think through which trades affect or will be affected by the change.

To best facilitate these conversations and to build trust and mutual respect, consider forming a trades council.

It's important to note that the most successful trades councils are run by the trades—not by the builder—and include a cross-section of trade partners. The council gets together to discuss shared challenges and opportunities, with the goal of improving process and relationships—both among the trades and with your in-house team.

### **Sense-check all key departments:**

**Architecture:** How does a proposed change affect the construction drawings (CDs)? Do redlines need to be made on plan sets to reflect the change? Have any redlined CDs been sent to the field team?

**Purchasing:** Do scopes of work need to be adjusted? Are current contracts still

Assembling a checklist for change that ensures these questions and others get addressed may be useful for your company.

**Educate the field team:** Take the time to educate all construction managers (CMs) who will be on the front line of the change. Even though your trades will be primarily responsible for implementing the change, your CMs should still be knowledgeable about the installation guidelines and the baseline for an exemplary installation.

Also, answer any questions from your CMs about the change, including the reasoning behind it and how it is expected to improve construction quality, as well as the related benefits to the business, such as reduced warranty exposure and a better reputation among trade partners and customers.

**Engage the manufacturer:** If you are making a product or system change, request that the manufacturer of the new product provide jobsite training for CMs and trades. What better way to learn proper installation

are installed. One builder told me they couldn't believe the difference a mock-up made to align their trades.

Ensure proper oversight by having your CMs and area manager on site to witness and troubleshoot the first installation of a new product, material, or system, or the first time a new process is used.

The CM should be present to see the trade perform the install, and the foreman of that crew also should be present to oversee and coach them until everyone is confident that all parties know how to implement the change correctly.

While these steps may seem cumbersome and time-consuming, they all but ensure success. And I promise, your trades and your field teams will thank you. **PB**

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