

The Industrial Contractor

We are contractors who are willing to tackle some of the most difficult, challenging, and complex coatings and linings projects on the planet. We apply coatings (paint) and linings for the primary purpose of asset preservation; i.e., keeping steel from rusting, concrete from crumbling, and protecting other surfaces from sometimes very aggressive chemicals that would otherwise destroy a tank or vessel.

That is the basic definition. When you take a closer look at the complex nature of our projects it gets really interesting and complicated. First, you need to understand many, if not most of the structures we paint are complex, complicated, and hard to get to. Often, we work at great heights where we must gain access to structures that require complex rigging and staging equipment. We must be able to figure out a way to stage our equipment and materials in order to get our crews in a position to perform

the task of surface preparation and application of industrial coatings. We perform work in places where people do not ordinarily go. This takes careful thought and extraordinary attention to detail.

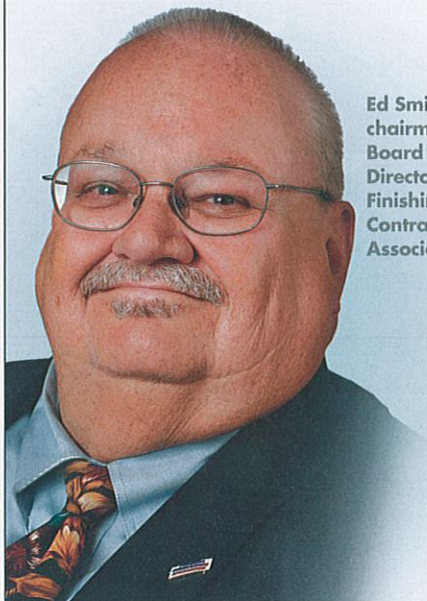
Experience is generally the best teacher, and I learned this lesson the hard way. Years ago, when I first got into the business of bidding industrial type work, I received a phone call from a guy who wanted me to give him a price to paint an 80-foot flag pole. No big deal, right? I knew one of our painters could easily paint an 80-foot flag pole in one day. I gave the man a bid and he said, "When can you start? Next week?" Done deal. The flagpole was in the city.

That's all I knew and I didn't ask for further details. Big mistake.

As it turned out, the flagpole was mounted at the corner on the top floor of one of the tallest buildings in the city of St. Louis. To make matters worse, the flagpole leaned out over one of the busiest intersections in town. When I finally learned the details, it made a huge difference in the price. The difficulty of getting to the flagpole and setting up took longer than it did to paint it!

When I ultimately did what I should have done in the first place, which was to check out the details, I called the customer and said, "Sir, I made a mistake. I didn't ask enough questions and failed to take the time to drive to the jobsite to be sure I knew all of the site conditions. I will paint your flagpole for the price I quoted you, but when my boss finds out what I have done, first he is going to kill me and then he will fire me."

It turned out the customer knew I bid the job too low and was kind enough to allow me to raise my price. He became a real friend and I did other maintenance work at that 20-story building for many years to come.



Ed Smith,
chairman,
Board of
Directors,
Finishing
Contractors
Association.

Ed Smith is chairman of the Finishing Contractors Association (FCA), the only international trade association devoted exclusively to serving the unique needs of U.S. and Canadian union contractors in the drywall finishing, glass and glazing, floor covering, painting and decorating, and signs and display trades. All FCA members are signatory to collective bargaining agreements with the International Union of Painters and Allied Trades. To learn more about the FCA, go to www.finishingcontractors.org, or call 301-215-7026.

The fact is, details are important in all aspects of the finishing trades. However, the need for close attention to details is magnified tremendously in the industrial sector. And to be successful as an industrial painting contractor you cannot afford to miss critical details that could cause catastrophic problems.

Details missed in the estimating phase of a project can result in an enormous loss of money and put you out of business really fast. Mistakes in the approach and details in mobilization, rigging, and staging of equipment and materials will cause inefficiencies that will result in a "bad job". By the way, a bad job translates

to an unhappy customer, unhappy workforce, a very unhappy contractor, and life as we know it isn't fun.

Many times we work with customer representatives who are pretty smart people and some of them engineers by education. I have actually had one engineer ask me, "How in the world do you ever get these jobs done? Isn't it too hot, too cold, or too humid?" He was right. It isn't easy and the tolerances built into industrial coatings specifications are tight. My answer to him was "It isn't easy. But I promise you this - we have read the specification and paint manufacturers instructions and will follow them to the 'T'". Then, we do what we say we are going to do.

Above all else, the most critical detail is managing a safe jobsite. The most important details are those that surround the safety of our workforce. We cannot miss a single training requirement or safety procedure. We cannot ever send our crews to a jobsite without the proper skills, tools, and training to do the job right and leave the jobsite to safely return home.

So who in their right mind would want to be an industrial painting contractor? What we do isn't easy and it has to be taken seriously. But if you are willing to pay extraordinary attention to the details that will produce a "good, safe job", industrial construction can be exciting and rewarding.

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