

BY STEVEN BACZEK

## The ‘Buy-In’

**One of the greatest takeaways** from the four years I spent in the Marine Corps was the understanding of a ladder of leadership and responsibility. The bottom of that ladder—where the boots hit the road—is the “fire team,” a small, organized group of four Marines. When you’re building a house, the leadership ladder is similar, with the building crew as the fire team on the jobsite, responsible for carrying out the construction details at the most basic level.

Recently, I began work on a high-performance home, and while my familiarity with the performance details in the home were solid, I needed a way to convey those details to the crew. Having worked many times with the project’s builder, Shoreline Builders of Scituate, Mass., I knew that I could count on their commitment to success at every level. But this new project had higher

performance standards than our past collaborations, so I was looking for a way to get everyone to buy into the process.

With the new challenges of this project, Shoreline’s owner, Jim Wolffer, asked me to meet with him and his crew to develop a deeper understanding of the construction details. A week before the meeting, Wolffer gave preliminary drawings to the entire crew, asking them to bring their questions and comments. As in a Marine Corps fire team, it was crucial that each member of the crew understood the details and scope of the project—their mission—along with the paths, the goals, and the duties of the other crew members around them.

Taking the crew out of the field for an entire afternoon carried a big price tag for Wolffer. But he saw the meeting as an investment rather than a cost. He figured that one mistake on the project

The architect and the building crew met to question and review the details of a challenging project to make sure everyone was on the same page before the project began.



Photos courtesy Shoreline Builders

could cost more time and money than a meeting ever would. More important than the cost, this meeting would help us deliver the best project possible.

Wolffer and I divided the meeting into three parts. First, I presented an overview of a high-performance house and its components, which gave the crew an understanding of the complete trajectory of the project.

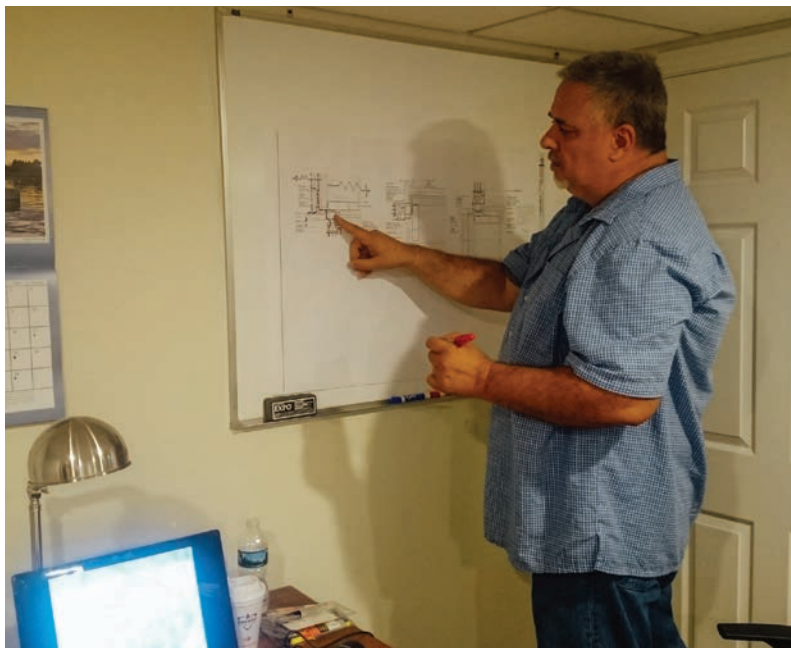
In the second part, I showed the crew some past case studies. The photos brought to life all the concepts that I'd presented in the first part of the meeting. The photos also legitimized the details by showing that they had already been successfully implemented on other projects—this proved key to getting the crew's buy-in.

What followed was a very involved—and welcome—conversation. The entire team had become closely engaged with the details that go into building a high-performance home. The team had done their homework and came in with questions, suggestions, and a desire to think through and grasp every step in the building process.

For the last part, we reviewed the details of the actual project we'd be building together. Here, I leaned on a mantra of the Corps: "We run as fast as the slowest man, and no one gets left behind." The entire crew needed to understand the project details with nothing left in question, and no one in the dark—this was mission critical. We talked through how each detail would be built, discussing airtightness, water management, vapor control, and the thermal barrier at length. We broke down each of these items into its key components and discussed how they related to each other. This way, we identified the most important pieces of the project, as well as areas of less concern.

As a result of this meeting, Wolffer and his guys are now efficiently working on the project with a clear understanding of where to focus their efforts and where not to. I left with a better grasp of how the crew dealt with my drawings. We gained respect for each other and the jobs we have to do to accomplish a unified mission.

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The crew looked at drawings and photos of how certain high-performance details had been executed on previous projects (top). They not only asked questions about the details, but also offered suggestions for how they might improve on how the details were built. The architect and the crew then broke down the details of this particular project (above), underscoring the most critical areas for accomplishing the high level of performance.