

SAFETY FIRST

WITH TAMMY K. CLARK



Construction Headaches: Subs of Subs of Subs (Part 1C)

In March, I introduced a new series designed to offer insight and solutions to some of the most frustrating issues on today's construction projects. The first in this series is a column about dealing with 2nd and 3rd tier subcontractors. You can review parts 1a and 1b ([March](#) & [May](#) newsletters) before reading this article here. Controlling contractors must fully understand the "big picture" of what has happened within the construction industry over the past 10 years and their role in helping to resolve the problems created by these industry changes, if we are to experience true change. After reviewing the reasons why this has become such an issue in recent years, we can now look at how we can focus our efforts on overcoming this very real and very frustrating problem.

We've discussed the most important aspect for dealing with this issue, which is communication. Most organizations struggle with good communication, which is a leading cause of failures. We've also discussed the importance of consistent enforcement, with proper documentation of all enforcement activities. But there is one additional, and very important aspect to solving this problem, and that is education.

The recent industry changes have collectively put a controlling contractor at significant risk for citations and penalties today as they are being cited for unsafe and/or non-compliant activities of their subcontractors on site. This becomes especially concerning when there are 2nd and 3rd tier subs on site. As a result, controlling contractors must realize that they have no choice but to come alongside their subs and help educate them. If we are only as good as our subs, then how can we not do this?

Helping our contractors who want to do it right, but simply do not have the resources to do so, is the best way I have found to ensure safer, more compliant projects. So how can we help educate our subs and resolve the issues with their subs? In several ways, actually.

First, open up your own internal company trainings to all your partner subcontractors! Offer them the opportunity to participate in legally-required trainings, and even optional trainings that they may not have the money to pay for themselves. This will solidify your partnerships and show goodwill, and it will naturally help to raise the bar on your projects as your subs become more safety-educated.

Second, provide resources and help to them with safety documents. They may be struggling with their own internal safety program, manual, and other documents, so offer some assistance to ensure they are compliant. It takes a little time and effort, but the results are so beneficial that they are measurable!

Third, as we help them, we also instruct them that they now have the responsibility to educate their own subcontractors, as they are directly responsible for their subs in the same manner the GC is for its subs. I have seen great gains in the way of safety performance and compliance by embracing the role of educator today, and teaching our subs how to do the same. An educational approach to this problem is incredibly successful and rewarding. Wishing you safe, compliant, and collaborative success on all your projects!



Tammy K. Clark is a construction industry Safety & Quality Consultant with over 20 years experience as a business owner, consultant, educator, and speaker. Tammy has worked with renowned clients nationwide. She is a member of ASSE, former Chair for the NAWIC National Safety & Health Awareness Committee, and was nominated as one of the Grand Rapids Business Journal's 50 Most Influential Women. You can contact Tammy at tammy@tammyclark.com.