



# ESTIM

## IS FUNDAMENTAL TO

### Estimator Turns Educator to Support Local Industry's Professional Development

by Steve Freeman

"Count the cost" is more than an admonition about being prepared. In the construction field, it plays a vital role in accurately bidding for projects and then efficiently meeting budgets.

The task is known as "estimating," and Joshua Huck believes more firms—and more employees—should know how to do it, or how to do it more efficiently.

Huck is an executive board member of the Consulting Estimators Round Table (CERT), a national nonprofit that promotes ethics, validation, education and fellowship among consulting estimator firms based in the U.S. He is also credentialed by CERT.

Additionally, Huck is Owner and President of Precision Estimating Inc., a veteran-owned company that performs estimating, scheduling and proposal writing for architects, developers, general contractors and subcontractors.

After serving six years in the U.S. Air Force in the construction management department, Huck worked as a

construction estimator for large general contractors around the world. He started his own company in 2011 and today serves clients throughout the U.S. from his base location in Connecticut. While his firm is small (two part-time employees and one intern), he serves a diverse client base comprised of general contractors, architects, subcontractors, real estate developers and insurance companies. Any client pursuing government projects is especially drawn to his services.

"We know the government and have extensive experience on military projects. We have worked with small disadvantaged businesses, minority- and women-owned businesses, and service-disabled veteran-owned small businesses on federal installations for all branches of the government and military," says Huck.

After 26 years as an estimator, he began to see a need for more firms to have their own internal estimators—and for those estimators to grow in their abilities. He also recognized the necessity for the new generation of professionals to understand the basics so as to grow into the role.

# ESTIMATING

## CONSTRUCTION PLANNING

### PARTNERSHIP MEETS CRUCIAL EDUCATIONAL NEED

He answered by creating a training session for architects, engineers, contractors, subcontractors and even those in the real estate field. Training is generally provided directly to the firms.

**“Estimating is one of the biggest challenges that small- to medium-sized subcontractors face . . . These educational seminars are going to help companies across the board, large and small, but really are going to benefit those that are transitioning from residential to commercial construction.”**

***-Tony Borrelli, New England Regional Director, The Blue Book Building & Construction Network***

Recently, Huck partnered with The Blue Book Building & Construction Network (The Blue Book Network) to conduct a series of estimating training workshops in the New England area. The idea was first hatched after Huck delivered an educational presentation on estimating at one of The Blue Book Network’s regional Showcase events, held in April 2016 at Gillette Stadium in Foxborough, Massachusetts.

“After Joshua delivered his presentation, he had a line of people wanting to talk to him. Many of the attendees shared with me how helpful the seminar was, and raved about Joshua’s performance. They vocalized a desire to participate in other educational opportunities like this one in the future,” says Tony Borrelli, New England Regional Director for The Blue Book Network. “We recognized the extreme value of these types of seminars, especially in small group settings that are more informal, relaxed and open-discussion in nature. So, we spoke with Joshua about partnering together on future training sessions, and he agreed that it would be a worthwhile venture.”

In June 2016, The Blue Book Network sponsored a stand-alone, three-hour seminar on estimating, led by Huck, at a Marriott hotel in Massachusetts. The event covered topics ranging from building plans analysis to forecasting to pricing jobs.

Huck plans to participate in another stand-alone training event sponsored by The Blue Book Network this fall. “The learning curve for estimating can go from five years to a year or less for a person who attends,” says Borrelli.



**Joshua Huck (right) speaks with participants at an estimating training workshop. Huck's goal is to help every attendee evolve into a valued, knowledgeable estimator on a firm's team.**

Borrelli adds that these educational opportunities are having a positive impact in the professional development of trade professionals, particularly those in small- to medium-sized firms.

"We are dedicated to supporting the needs of our members. Estimating is one of the biggest challenges that small- to medium-sized subcontractors face. While they have the skills to perform work on bigger projects, they lack the technical ability to accurately price larger projects. These educational seminars are going to help companies across the board, large and small, but really are going to benefit those that are transitioning from residential to commercial construction, in terms of size and scope of projects," he says.

The model attendee is someone who either has a need for in-house skills at his or her company, or who sees an opportunity for advancement at a firm or in the larger profession itself.

Estimating skills are even necessary for job superintendents and project managers, Huck adds.

While estimating is a necessity in many skilled trade positions, it's not always the most alluring career choice. "People aren't going into the estimating field, but rather are interested in a role such as project manager because there's more glory and better pay through this and other alternate routes," Huck says. "The result is a huge deficit of estimators across the country."

Most participants in these educational seminars are construction professionals under the age of 30. "I started to

try to bring young people into it to give back to the younger generation," he says.

He found that people of all ages can use the basic training or a refresher course. Though some subcontractors cannot bring on skilled estimators, they may have an in-house employee who can use this training to get up to speed on the necessary skills.

While all participants are "students," some real-life students take Huck's training courses, too. One such student is Alex Corcoran of Bristol, Rhode Island.

"From my personal standpoint, learning about estimating is crucial because it's one of the only parts of construction that is universal throughout every construction sector and will always be in demand," says Corcoran, a senior construction management student at Roger Williams University in Bristol. "Estimating sits hand-in-hand with the ability to make profit, so every firm needs a good estimator."

## BREAKING IT DOWN

Some people who perform estimating work do not possess the customized skills needed, so they may rely heavily on savvy software and services to achieve project estimations. Huck says this approach can indeed determine costs, but is not as precise as professionals doing the timely research and asking the questions to get accurate pricing based on the individual job conditions.

Huck's goal is to give each attendee insight into estimating so that he or she can rapidly become a valued estimator on a firm's team.

**"If your fundamentals aren't solid and you're not adapting to advances, you will be left behind."**

**-Joshua Huck, President of Precision Estimating**

Joshua Huck, Owner and President of Precision Estimating Inc., leads an estimating training workshop. He is credentialed by, and is an executive board member of, the Consulting Estimators Round Table (CERT).



**Among the topics explored are:**

- Review of current estimating methods
- Reading blueprints
- Avoiding common errors
- Estimating checklists
- Quarterly adjustments for man-hours and materials
- Site visit considerations
- Equipment estimating
- Materials estimating
- Evaluating the competition

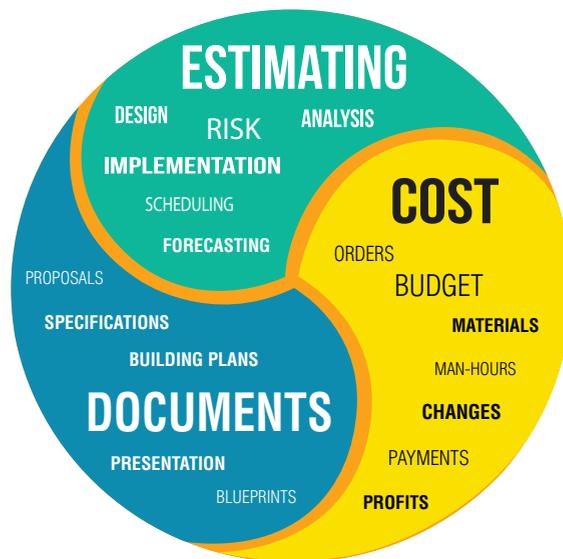
Discussions also cover common aspects of estimating, including “what if” analysis, cost database use and proposal generation.

“Josh takes the time to personalize his presentations to the individual needs of the client,” says Corcoran. “This means that every presentation he gives is useful, and the materials he provides will be available later on to help guide and structure future estimates.”

To Huck, “counting the cost” is a mandate for greater education among professionals already in the field as well. He says some of the most common areas in which seasoned professionals need to brush up on estimating

skills include: getting correct and updated pricing (and ensuring that these prices come from the subcontractors); obtaining accurate quality takeoffs (precise materials, measurements and specifications); and learning to use basic technology to generate estimates.

“If your fundamentals aren’t solid and you’re not adapting to advances, you will be left behind,” Huck says. 🗨️



*Author Bio: Steve Freeman is a contributing writer and communications management professional based in Pauls Valley, Okla. He is also Principal of Freeman Communications.*