



The Mechanical Engineer ‘Set-up’

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There is a ‘set-up’ out there that can trip up good mechanical engineers if they are not aware of it. It goes like this:

1. The call goes out from architects or other design team members: “Where, oh where can be found a good mechanical engineer who can communicate?”
2. So, Mechanical engineer who can communicate is found and presented for consideration.
3. Mechanical engineer looks over the project, looks over the team, looks over the relationships between owner and each other.
4. Mechanical engineer starts to communicate. Mechanical engineer starts to ask questions. Mechanical engineer asks many questions.
5. Based on answers (or lack of) mechanical engineer presents lists of what he/she needs to do the job.
6. Dead silence from group. Then confusion, then chaos. “Mechanical engineer really doesn’t mean this.” “Mechanical engineer is trying to gain advantage.” Or as an architect recently accused: “You are trying to make a cause célèbre of the mechanical system”.
7. Mechanical engineer knows she was invited because of ability to communicate. So Mechanical engineer *communicated*. So what happened?

Mechanical engineer is at a crossroads. Presenting his/her best assessment has produced not rewards but conflicts. Furthermore, team members are now offering ‘helpful’ suggestions to promote collegiality and teamwork.

The Set-up.

At this point mechanical engineer is most vulnerable. Unless his intellect is fully functioning and in control, he could fall for it.

Let’s examine what happens if he does fall for it. Ah—conflict gone. He can relax, he is now popular, he has ‘come to his senses’, he ‘takes instruction’ from the team. Oh, those earlier concerns were probably a figment of his imagination. These guys are so nice, they would stand up for him if something went wrong. Surely they will remember that against my better judgment I followed their suggestions on the mechanical system.

STOP. Time to check for the presence of the ‘Set-up’.

The hard question to ask oneself when these ‘helpful suggestions’ come forth *in lieu of granting what you’ve already stated you need*:

If I used this suggestion against my better judgment to design the mechanical system, and it caused problems, would the author(s) of it step forward to take responsibility?

If the answer is no, then you are looking at the age-old ‘Set-up’ with a new facade. Proceed at your own risk.