Building Great Project Managers

A FIELD GUIDE FOR GLAZING & FAÇADE TEAMS

Practical strategies for reducing risk, improving outcomes, and building stronger project teams — from the team at JEI Structural.

WE TEACH. WE PROTECT. WE RESPOND.

JEIstructural.com

Introduction

Today's glazing and façade projects are more complex than ever. Schedules are tight, budgets are aggressive, and expectations keep rising. Small issues — especially around movement, coordination, and system limitations — can quickly turn into costly problems if they're not addressed early.

Most project managers didn't create these challenges — but they inherit them. Specifications don't always align with real-world conditions. Systems are often selected before full engineering is complete. And important details get pushed later, when they're harder and more expensive to solve.

What Great Project Managers Do Differently

They ask better questions early. They bring the right people into the conversation. They recognize risk before it shows up in the field. And they build strong relationships that help projects move forward the right way.

This field guide is built from real experience in the glazing industry — and from the same communication, leadership, and technical training JEI uses to develop our own team. At JEI Structural, we work alongside project managers every day. We believe the best projects happen when people communicate early, support each other, and stay focused on getting it right.

Under Promise. Over Perform.

The JEI Promise

We believe in clear communication, early alignment, strong relationships, and doing things right the first time.

- ✓ **We Teach**
- ✓ **We Protect**
- ✓ **We Respond**

JEI Structural
Facade & Glazing Systems
Consulting | Engineering | Drafting

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Why Great Project Managers Matter More Than Ever

The glazing and façade industry is under mounting pressure. Turnover among top contractors is real, margins are tighter than ever, and project complexity continues to rise. In this environment, the quality of project management isn't just a soft advantage — it's a hard line of defense against failure.

Industry Pressure

Tight margins and complex projects create compounding risk. Turnover means less institutional knowledge on site, and the gap between what's specified and what's buildable keeps widening.

Delegated Design Liability

Litigation tied to ignored building movement, misaligned systems, and incomplete engineering is rising. Delegated design responsibility means the contractor carries more risk than ever before.

Real Field Consequences

When engineering gaps go unaddressed, the results are visible and costly: glass breakage, seal failures, and water intrusion that damage both the building and the contractor's reputation.

> ***"Ignoring building movement can lead to glass breakage and seal failures within 3–5 years."***
>
> — Stewart Jeske, MS, P.E
> Industry Expert

The root problem runs deeper than any single project. Specifications are often cut-and-paste documents that don't reflect actual site conditions. Systems are sold based on standard performance data rather than project-specific analysis. Engineering is pushed too late in the process, when course corrections are expensive and disruptive. The result: projects that look complete on paper but are not actually buildable as specified so require expensive field changes.

Key Mindset: Great project managers don't just manage the job — they protect it.

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The Hidden Risk of Low-Cost Engineering

Engineering is one of the smallest line items on a glazing or façade project — often a fraction of a percent of total project value. But it carries some of the greatest long-term risk. When engineering is disregarded, under-scoped, or engaged too late, the consequences show up in the field at the worst possible time.

Why Gaps Occur

Glass, glazing, and mixed-material façade systems are rarely taught in engineering school. Most expertise is developed through real project experience, which means knowledge is uneven and approaches are often driven by standard system data and out of date rules of thumb, rather than an engineered integration into a unique building.

- Limited consideration of building movement and drift
- Interface conditions between systems often overlooked
- Delegated design responsibility not addressed.
- Focus on system performance rather than integrated building behavior

A Better Approach

The most effective project managers treat engineering as an investment, not a cost center. Early engagement produces better outcomes, fewer surprises, and stronger documentation if issues arise later.

- Engage engineering early in the design and procurement process
- Look for project-specific thinking — not just standard details
- Build relationships with trusted engineering advisors
- Verify that scope of engineering matches the complexity of the project

> The least expensive engineering can become the most expensive decision.

JEI Principle: Strong teams don't compete — they complement each other. Engineering partners should be selected for fit, not just for price.

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Drafting Services by People Who've Been in the Field

Drafting is where architectural intent meets real-world execution. When your drafting team has actual glazing, shop and field experience, the drawings they produce reflect how systems are actually built.



Build-Ready Shop Drawings

Drawings reflect real fabrication and installation sequences, improving for efficiency and accuracy on site.



Field-Optimized Details

Engineered details account for field conditions, tolerances, and building movement, minimizing on-site adjustments.



Reduced RFIs & Surprise

Proactive problem-solving in design, leads to fewer Requests for Information and unexpected issues during installation.



Faster Review Cycles

Reviewers trust the team and in-house safety checks, accelerating approval times and keeping projects on schedule.



Integrated Coordination

Direct, seamless coordination between drafting and engineering under one roof or integrated partner, ensures comprehensive and accurate solutions and reduces schedule.

JEI Insight: Our drafting team brings hands-on glazing and years of façade experience to every project — so the drawings work in the field, not just in the office. Drafting & Engineering under one roof reduces mistakes and optimizes schedule.

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How Great Project Managers Operate

Exceptional project managers in the glazing industry share a distinct operating style. They are intentional about where they invest their attention, disciplined in how they communicate, and proactive about identifying risk before it escalates. These aren't innate traits — they're developed habits and practiced skills.

1

The 80/20 Mindset

The best PMs focus on the few decisions and conversations that drive the majority of results. They don't get buried in low-impact administrative tasks — they identify the highest-leverage activities and protect time for those consistently.

2

Time Management as Risk Prevention

Prioritizing planning and coordination — rather than reactive firefighting — is the single most powerful habit a project manager can build. What prevents problems is always cheaper than what fixes them.

3

Communication as the Core Job

Every interaction is an opportunity to move the project forward or strengthen the relationships that do. Before each call: define the objective and identify the decision needed. During: keep discussion aligned and assign clear action items. After: confirm next steps and debrief internally.

4

Know Your People

Tools like DISC (communication style) and the Enneagram (motivation and stress response) help project managers adapt their approach to each individual. Adjusting how you communicate based on the person and situation is a force multiplier for team performance.

JEI Training Insight: At JEI, we train our team in time management, personality awareness, situational leadership, and high-performance team dynamics — because great project delivery starts with great people skills.

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Conflict Resolution & High-Pressure Communication

In construction, conflict is inevitable. Schedules slip, scopes blur, and pressure builds. What separates top-performing project managers isn't the absence of conflict — it's how they navigate it. The goal is always to solve the problem without creating a new one.

Resolving Conflict Without Damaging Relationships

Relationship capital is one of the most valuable assets a project manager can hold. Every conflict resolution is either a deposit or a withdrawal from that account. The most effective approach is systematic and calm:

- **Assume positive intent** — most problems are not personal
- **Focus on the issue**, not the person
- **Use facts and documentation** to anchor the conversation
- **Offer solutions** rather than just surfacing problems
- **Protect the relationship** as a long-term asset

Handling High-Pressure Conversations

Difficult conversations — from unreasonable architects pushing back on costs to GCs demanding impossible schedules — are a regular part of this industry. Great project managers stay steady and lead through pressure rather than escalating it.

- Stay calm — don't match the other person's emotional temperature
- Don't take pressure personally; separate the situation from the individual
- Acknowledge the pressure and validate the concern
- Bring the conversation back to solutions and facts
- Set respectful, clear boundaries when needed
- Follow up in writing to create a clear record
- Don’t get involved in the blame game but be responsible.
- Pick up the phone and talk

> **JEI Principle:** Be Easy on People and Hard of Circumstances.

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Staying on Budget Without Creating Risk

Budget management in glazing and façade contracting is not just about tracking costs — it's about making decisions early enough that you still have options. By the time a problem shows up in the field, the cheap solution is usually gone. The best project managers treat budget protection as a proactive discipline, not a reactive scramble.



Identify Problems Early

Review drawings immediately upon receipt. Flag gaps, conflicts, and ambiguities before they become expensive surprises. Early discovery means early options.



Control Scope Rigorously

Clearly define what is included and excluded in your contract. If something changes the work, it changes the price — every time, without exception. Ambiguous scope is where budget leaks.



Get Preliminary Engineering

Early engineering involvement leads to better outcomes and fewer surprises. Treat it as an investment that reduces downstream cost risk, not as a line item to minimize.



Turn RFIs Into Protection

Every RFI should be tied to cost and schedule impact where applicable. Document clearly and consistently. RFIs are not just clarification tools — they are a financial and legal protection mechanism.

Rule: Cheap decisions early become expensive problems later. Avoid false savings — the cost will find you eventually, and usually at the worst moment.

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When Specifications Don't Work

One of the most common — and most dangerous — assumptions in glazing and façade contracting is that the specification is correct. It often isn't. Specifications are frequently assembled from previous projects, standard language libraries, and boilerplate details that haven't been reconciled with the actual building, the actual systems, or the actual site conditions. Recognizing this early and responding systematically is a critical skill for any top-performing project manager.

Warning Signs to Watch For

- Conflicting requirements between sections
- Unrealistic performance expectations
- Missing movement or interface details
- Systems specified without full engineering
- Details that don't reflect actual building geometry

Remember: "Specified" does not mean "buildable."

Rule: If you solve it without documentation — you own it. Every undocumented resolution is a liability you've accepted without compensation.

Turn Problems Into Paid Solutions

When you identify a specification gap, submit RFIs with clear explanations and engineering-backed recommendations. Use language like: *"This condition requires design development beyond the contract documents."* Provide 2–3 solutions with cost and schedule implications. This protects your scope and demonstrates technical leadership.

Bring the Right Voice

When specs don't match real-world conditions, bring your engineering partner in early. Let them lead the technical discussion while you stay focused on the project. Strong PMs bring the right experts into the room.

At JEI, we regularly support PMs in these conversations—clarifying intent, reducing risk, and keeping projects moving.

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The Top 20% Project Manager

In every industry, a small percentage of performers drive a disproportionate share of results. In glazing and façade contracting, the top 20% of project managers share a recognizable set of behaviors and habits that distinguish them from the rest of the field. These are not personality traits — they are deliberate practices that can be learned, developed, and consistently applied.



Communicate Early

They get the right information to the right people before a problem becomes urgent. Early communication creates options; late communication creates emergencies.



Bring In Experts Sooner

They don't wait until a problem is undeniable to engage engineering or specialty support. Early expert involvement changes outcomes — and cost profiles — fundamentally.



Think Ahead

They are always working 2–3 steps ahead of where the project currently stands. Anticipating what's coming — and preparing for it — is their most valuable competitive advantage.



Protect the Project

They document proactively, submit RFIs strategically, and ensure that risk is identified, communicated, and properly allocated — not silently absorbed.



Build Strong Relationships

They invest in relationships with owners, GCs, engineers, and subcontractors — because strong relationships create the trust that makes hard conversations easier and good outcomes more likely.



Learn Modern Software

Don't fight the tools—learn them. Project management is evolving fast. The teams that win are not always the busiest—they're the most organized, visible, and responsive.

> The best project managers aren't the busiest — they're the most **intentional**.

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The JEI Way

Great projects don't just happen — they're built by teams who share the same mindset. At JEI Structural, we invest in developing our team not just technically, but in how we communicate, lead, and support our clients. The same principles we use internally are what we bring to every project we touch.

What We Believe

Every principle in this field guide reflects how JEI operates. We believe that clear communication, early alignment, strong relationships, and doing things right the first time are not aspirational values — they are operational standards. When project managers and engineering partners share this mindset, the whole project performs better.

Where JEI Fits on Your Projects

Delegated Design Support

Engineering that matches the real scope and complexity of your project.

Movement & Load Expertise

Building behavior analysis that prevents the failures that show up years later.

Complex Façade Conditions

Project-specific thinking for conditions that standard details can't address.

We Help Project Managers:

- ✓ Reduce risk early — before it's expensive
- ✓ Identify specification gaps before they become field problems
- ✓ Provide engineering-backed RFI support
- ✓ Navigate delegated design responsibility with confidence
- ✓ Build projects that perform — long after substantial completion

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