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Spotlight: Chris Conn

Give him an opportunity, and he'll take it.

Give him a goal, and he'll beat it.

Assign him a project, and he'll likely use it as a way to set the standard for the entire construction industry.

Meet **Chris Conn**, senior superintendent with DCI Group and overseer of Campus Blueprint construction.

What he does

On the job since March 18, 2013, shortly before renovations began, Conn is making the most of a rare opportunity in the construction business in central Iowa—the chance to oversee the renovation of a multi-building campus.

Conn has been in the construction business since 1987. And he and his DCI Group team of nine are working on Corporate One, Principal Plaza and 801 Grand, managing the Campus Blueprint construction from start to finish. They create the schedule and work closely with contractors to stay on track. (So far, so good—we're on target to move into the building next summer!) Conn also serves as a liaison between the construction firms, city officials, architects and others.

Jumping on the opportunity

Conn was recruited from another construction firm to take on his role. He leapt at the chance.

"A guy in my position doesn't get this type of opportunity very often to work on an entire campus," he says. "Everything's about three times bigger than if it were just building a single building."

Since the work began in 2013, more than 3,600 construction workers have come onsite. "Right now we have about 250 people a day in Corporate One. My guess is we'll be up to 450-500 people working on Corporate One at its peak. This is about the most we'll have at any one time, when the demolition team and the finishing teams are both onsite."

The size and scope of the project requires a lot more attention to detail. DCI Group has created a very detailed scheduling process for this campus project; Conn says they take their scheduling processes down to the day, even though most firms do a weekly schedule.

We meet with all the foremen at the end of every day. He says, "We're always asking: 'Are we working our plan? Are we on target? Are we going to be done early?' We don't want to lose any time in between tasks." He says the daily meetings really help facilitate communication.

He also meets with all the key foremen once a week to plan the schedule for the upcoming week.

"We plan every activity we're doing by floor, by area and by trade. And at 2 p.m. every day, we go over daily plan and our daily safety inspection," he says. "The schedule is down to the day and down to each person. It's the most detailed of all the plans I've ever put together. It includes bits and pieces I've learned from over the years all rolled into one."

Conn says there are anywhere from 150-225 activities a day, and the scheduling process keeps track of them all. His goal? Not only a successful renovation for Principal, but also helping his colleagues in the industry become better planners.

Ryan Carpenter, assistant director—corporate real estate, says, "Campus Blueprint has unique coordination and scheduling challenges. Renovating existing buildings that are tied electrically, mechanically and by skywalk and tunnel to other occupied buildings requires a whole different skillset. We couldn't be happier with the job that Chris and the construction team are doing to move the project forward on time and on budget."

Doing recycling one better

Beyond improving what you might think of as typical work processes, Conn has also met and exceeded his own goals for recycling.

Our commitment to protecting the environment means we wanted to recycle as much of the construction waste as possible throughout the renovations. LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) guidelines include a target landfill diversion rate of at least 70 percent for construction waste.

But Conn knew he could do better. He set his own goal of 90 percent, and on average for 750 Park, 801 Grand and Corporate One, we've recycled about 94 percent of construction waste.

He says he always knew there was value with metal, so he set up metal dumpsters to separate that from the remainder of the garbage for our renovations. But that was just the beginning.

"I wanted to challenge everybody to recycle as much as they could. I started looking for other things we could recycle," he says. "So I talked to carpet manufacturers, tile companies and others, and tried to think about recycling items that had never been done before on a job."

He even challenged the roofing company for 750 Park to come up with a way to recycle the rooftop. The end result? We were able to sell it to a landscaping company who then recycled it for use in water features.

"We're challenging the industry now because we're going way over 70 percent," Conn says. "And some of our contractors are taking the programs we've implemented at Campus Blueprint to their other jobs."

Carpenter says, "We're really proud of the recycling results the team has achieved for Campus Blueprint. The scale of the project opened up recycling opportunities that we hadn't leveraged before. The team worked outside the box and has achieved very solid results."



Chris Conn, from DCI Group, oversees Campus Blueprint construction



Chris Conn, second from left, talks with others at the grand opening of the skywalk between 750 Park and Corporate Two in mid-2014. Pictured from left to right: Jared Stockel, Baker Group Controls; Chris; Chad Halupnick, DCI Group; Dave Hill, OPN Architects; David Frischmeyer, DCI Group; and Ralph Eucher, retired executive vice president.