

مينالأك MENALAC VENDOR TALK

MARCH 2021

DESIGN FOR PRODUCTION

How I Learned to Stop Worrying and *Embrace the Deadline*

Antoni Gaudi's Sagrada Familia in Barcelona was started in 1882. It is projected to be completed in 2026, a mere 144 years later. Very few of us in the entertainment production field have the pleasure of working on projects with such deadlines, nor are our claims for schedule delay as indisputable as the Spanish Civil War.



(image - Dragons AD April 18th 2017 #0123 Social Media.jpg) *Dragon Gliders attraction area, Motiongate Dubai, UAE.*

Antoni Gaudi's Sagrada Familia in Barcelona was started in 1882. It is projected to be completed in 2026, a mere 144 years later. Very few of us in the entertainment production field have the pleasure of working on projects with such deadlines, nor are our claims for schedule delay as indisputable as the Spanish Civil War.

In the world of entertainment production *turn-key* contracts have become the norm for project delivery. These projects challenge our teams to not only deliver on time, but to be *innovative* while doing it, all while schedules seem to be getting ever-more

ambitious. So how do we and our client-partners encourage creative thinking while at the same time adhering to rigid project deadlines? For Adirondack Studios and other design-build vendors, impending deadlines can bring creative-thinking to a screeching halt, *or* serve to inspire innovation. A 2002 Harvard Business Review article, titled "Creativity Under the Gun" looked into this topic; it makes clear that time pressure in and of itself does not inspire creativity. In order to allow deadlines to encourage creative thought Harvard points to a few key considerations that leaders and clients might consider.

Create space for teams to think. Giving our teams dedicated time to explore solutions and insulating them as much as possible from their business-as-usual obligations will create better products and experiences for our clients and guests. Creativity (in all its forms) requires time to consider multiple avenues and options; time for those ideas to fail and for new ones to develop in their place. Also important is allowing for ideas to incubate. To allow for the "aha!" moments that come to us when we are not laser-focussed on a given task or mired in back-to-back meetings. As leaders we need to make it okay for our team members to book focus time and to turn-off from their normal obligations - email inboxes and TPS reports can wait.

مينالأك MENALAC

VENDOR TALK

MARCH 2021



(image – The Rock.jpg) *The Rock pop-up restaurant completed for Spring Studios, New York City, USA.*

Build smaller teams. The all-hands-on-deck approach to problem solving is often misguided. We have all seen ‘brainstorming’ meetings go awry due to the size of the group or the personalities involved. Smaller teams, built around key individuals in principal roles, make for more agile reaction, with less discord and a greater degree of shared responsibility. Of course, this all comes down to building the right team. Key projects should receive dedicated support from art direction, technical direction, fabrication leads, and artisan craftspeople, with those key team members being engaged throughout the project cycle. Those individuals

should be empowered with decision-making responsibility over their area of expertise, but they also serve as a check and balance as ancillary issues come up elsewhere in the project. An important added benefit is that smaller teams build a fluency in the story and through-line of a project that provides stewardship internally and directly supports our clients’ creative vision. When successful, this fluency has a vitality *at all levels* of the team structure: artists, designers, and artisans alike.



(image – A24.png) *Puss-In-Boots’ Giant Journey for Universal Studios Singapore.*

Plan a mission and keep it attainable. Project leaders need to inspire and create a collective sense of purpose within their teams, a mission where team members are banded together towards a common, achievable goal. Teams need to have stock in the mission and see their success in problem-solving as directly tied to the accomplishment of that goal. Missions can be high-minded crusades such as the design of a key life safety unit, but they need not be. In fact, missions are often best when they are smaller tasks within the larger project. A good mission can be as simple as sourcing a group of key IP-inspired show

props on a tight schedule or the development of a finish sample using a restricted color palette due to a necessary method of manufacture. Successful missions create agency within a project that makes the next mission more likely to be achieved, while building momentum toward the larger project’s eventual success.

مينالأك MENALAC

VENDOR TALK

MARCH 2021



(image - Fountain of Dreams.jpg)
*Rotunda mural, Fountain of Dreams,
Motiongate Dubai, UAE.*

All of this is easier said than done, and some of it is downright contrary to how our businesses are inclined to operate. We need to be willing to restructure our approach to serve the end-goal of creating memorable and original experiences for our guests by first creating the atmosphere where creative solutions can flourish. Good design-build partners who can leverage their competency in design, fabrication and installation are key to providing innovation in the face of project challenges. But clients and owners looking for innovative and original work need to embrace these ideas as well. Perhaps the most important thing our

client-partners can contribute is to put-forth realistic schedules that bolster vendors to advance honest deadlines within their project teams. In so doing, ambitious deadlines can cease to snuff out creative energy and instead, serve to inspire. Former MythBuster and ILM-grad, Adam Savage put it this way, “Deadlines refine the mind. They remove variables like exotic materials and processes that take too long. The closer the deadline, the more likely you'll start thinking *waay* outside the box.” Sounds liberating, doesn't it?

This article is contributed by Seth Harkins, Creative Director, Adirondack Studios. Seth has been designing solutions, building teams, and worrying about schedules on behalf of Adirondack Studios and its clients around the world for 15 years.

The advice shared above expresses the expert views, best practices, thoughts, and opinions of our author, and not necessarily those of the author's employer or MENALAC.