Time to Step Back and Step Up

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There is often a chasm between knowing what is best and doing what is best. For instance, it's commonly accepted that a steady regimen of exercise, coupled with a proper diet consisting of fruits, vegetables, grains, and protein will keep us healthy well into our senior years. Regrettably, even with the wealth of information available on the nutritional aspects of foods and the high number of workout and recreational opportunities, there are actually more overweight, out of shape Americans than ever before. Obviously, there is a crucial step in going from the "knowing" to the "doing."

A similar divide has persisted within the group of people who are constructing our nation's multi-family housing, school dormitories, and senior housing. Think of the housing market as a process consisting of two parts, the small picture—"building," and the large picture—"living." Most of the professionals involved in this process—owners, architects, city officials, school board members, developers, contractors, etc.—are actually well-educated informed individuals who are earnestly trying to do a good job. They face the challenges of the "building" process as they try to juggle aesthetics, functionality, and building costs. At the same time, on a more personal level, they also understand the importance of the "living" process as well—everything that happens after a project is built. When we look at their lives "away from work," many of these people drive cars that fill up on E-85 fuel; recycle their paper, plastic, and aluminum; turn their thermostats down at night during the winter; take public transportation; and have great concern for the health and safety of the elderly and the young. Unfortunately, this is where the split between "what we know" and "what we do" often occurs.

Frequently, the over-emphasis on one or two select criteria of a building project clouds the view of the truly important aspects of the relationship between buildings and living. The total life cycle costs of a building have a direct and profound impact on the quality of life for our community, country, and world. The challenge to all professionals involved in housing is to: (1) minimize the adverse impact to the environment as we plan, design, and construct the structures we build (sustainability); (2) commit to a mind-set that will optimize the use of materials, methods, and management to lower heating and cooling demand, as well as, water & lighting usage (energy-efficiency); and (3) keep the occupants protected from fire and storms (life safety). We know that innovative total precast concrete wall and floor systems accomplish these goals, while still delivering aesthetic beauty, design versatility, durability, and cost-effectiveness. It is everyone's responsibility to continue to search out these and other like-minded building components and methodologies for the good of our planet.

So, take a step back from the minutia of details and look at the bigger picture. Get to know the best, then take a step up and do the best for your residential buildings and the community as a whole.