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The Project Influence Gap

It's often said that by the time a client engages with your company, more than half of their purchasing decisions have already been made. As a project team member, your's and the project's success depends on the relationships you build with the people shaping those decisions.

So how can a project still run on time, on budget, and with minimal risk when so many choices are made before you're even at the table? The answer lies in focusing on what you can control: the relationships, behaviors, and experiences that influence outcomes throughout the project lifecycle.

Understanding these key influencers and what drives them is essential for distributors who want to add real value. The familiar titles, architects, designers, brokers, project managers, general contractors, tell only part of the story. The deeper opportunity lies in recognizing why each relationship matters and how to engage more effectively.

Distributors are uniquely positioned to elevate these connections and, in turn, elevate project outcomes. When they engage early and at multiple levels, they save time, reduce errors, and prevent wasted effort. Early collaboration allows their expertise to shape decisions upstream before costly challenges emerge downstream.

Why Influence Is a Strategic Lever

Since the 1990s, it's been well known that most RFP and Design–Bid–Build projects go over budget, often by half. The process clearly needs to change, and distributors have an opportunity to help lead that change.

As Rex Miller notes in Real Estate Revolution, integrated project teams can cut costs by up to 25% and shorten schedules by more than 100 days. That kind of improvement starts with stronger, earlier, and more deliberate relationships.

Each influencer in the project lifecycle plays a specific role in bringing the client's goals to life. When

distributors engage these partners early and consistently, they gain insight into the bigger picture, allowing them to anticipate challenges, refine recommendations, and drive stronger project outcomes.

Early, multilevel integration lets distributors influence how value is defined before it's constrained by design and procurement silos.

This shift from execution partner to strategic integrator creates measurable benefits:

- Reduced risk of rework and scope creep
- More predictable margins and resource planning
- Higher client satisfaction and repeat business
- A reputation as a consultative leader rather than a commodity supplier

Where the Leverage Lies: Key Influencer Relationships

The goal is to build the kind of lasting influence that adapts as each partner's pressures and priorities shift. The following sections outline processes that allow distributors to tailor their approach to every situation.

COMMERCIAL REAL ESTATE BROKERS

Brokers are the earliest to know when clients explore new space, and set the tone for cost and timeline. Supporting them with clear, data-driven insights, cost per square foot, lead-time forecasts, or sustainability data helps them advise confidently.

To build lasting influence: observe what's driving their deals, identify the data gaps that limit their advice, co-create quick tools or briefings that link workplace strategy to leasing outcomes, evolve as market priorities shift, and institutionalize what works so your team can replicate it. Their early access to client intent makes them critical allies in moving the conversation from square footage to strategic fit.

ARCHITECTS & DESIGNERS

A&D firms balance design intent with cost and schedule realities. Sharing lead-time and pricing clarity keeps their vision on track.
To build lasting influence: learn their process, find friction between creativity and feasibility, co-create options that protect design intent while meeting budgets, evolve as their sustainability or material goals change, and institutionalize best-practice stories that demonstrate partnership. When distributors help bridge creative ambition and project reality, they become part of the design solution and not a constraint on it.

PROJECT MANAGERS

PMs manage risk, cost, and schedule under tight deadlines. Early engagement helps them forecast accurately and prevent rework.

To build lasting influence: understand their sequencing pressures, identify missing data that causes surprises, co-create realistic phase plans and logistics maps, evolve after each project through debriefs, and institutionalize proven workflows across your team. The earlier you help PMs clarify scope and logistics, the fewer downstream issues hit your own margins.

GENERAL CONTRACTORS
GCs coordinate every trade onsite and guard the schedule. Clear communication around installation timing prevents last-minute chaos.

To build lasting influence: observe how they stage the job, identify where furniture conflicts with other trades, co-create schedules that integrate with theirs, evolve by applying lessons from close-outs, and institutionalize reliable site-coordination practices for every project. Reliability and visibility on-site often determine whether furniture partners get invited back to the next build.

The Cultural Shift: From Reactive to Proactive

Influence starts inside. Distributors that want to move upstream need teams who think like advisors, not order takers. When sales, design, and operations align around a shared definition of value, performance follows, companies with this alignment outperform peers by 19% in profitability according to Harvard Business Review, 2023.

This transformation begins with leadership:

- Build learning cultures that help employees understand the client's business drivers, not just product specs.
- Invest in insight including tools, research, and data that give teams confidence to engage early.
- Empower autonomy so front-line teams can make decisions and act as trusted partners.

Bringing It All Together: The Customer, the Collaboration, and the Call to Lead

All influence ultimately converges on the client. Every interaction, with an architect, broker, or contractor, should deepen your understanding of their goals, culture, and long-term vision.
Distributors who act as curators of insight can become trusted guides. By connecting the right people and anticipating decisions before they're made, they help every stakeholder perform better. Each partner holds a piece of the puzzle. The distributor's value is in helping those pieces fit by aligning expertise, communication, and timing so projects run smoothly and reflect what the client truly needs. Early collaboration builds efficiency, trust, and long-term partnership.

For dealership leaders, the mandate is clear: stop competing for projects once decisions are set and start shaping those decisions from the start. Profitability will come not from sharper bids but from stronger influence earned through early engagement and relationships built on insight and trust.

Solomon Coyle helps distributors build the systems, skills, and tools to engage earlier, collaborate better, and win more profitable projects. From sales and project-management training to strategic planning, peer groups and benchmarking, we support teams ready to move from reactive to proactive.

Enrollment is now open for our January 2026 Sales Leadership Program, a 12-week blended experience designed for dealer sales leaders. Onboarding begins Jan 21, Orientation Jan 28. Visit solomoncoyle.com/education/sales-leadership-program to learn more and reserve your spot.

To learn more about how Solomon Coyle supports distributors in building stronger, more profitable relationships, contact support@solomoncoyle.com or visit www.solomoncoyle.com.