

HONESTY PAYS



JAMES WARNER

Although there have always been those who prefer to profit through scheming and less than honest dealing, it has been my experience that *honesty pays*. A fine example goes back about 50 years during the very early days of my former contracting business.

Our little firm had performed improvements in a city park that included the overlay of a tennis court. Fancy coating and surfacing systems had yet to be invented, so the surface the concrete finishers left became the final finish. One of my few employees at the time was an excellent concrete finisher. On kneeboards, we both had a very long reach and could perform a perfectly uniform rotary swirl finish. We took great pride in providing a continuous pattern that was flawless—far greater perfection that would rightly befit a low-bid public project.

A local tennis pro had noted the surface quality and recommended us for other jobs. On one, however, I refused to do such an overlay. A very wealthy inventor and industrialist was building his dream home. It consisted of three separate major prestressed concrete structures, which involved, among other things, the first prestressed masonry in the city of Los Angeles. As an aside, because prestressing was so new at the time and not covered in the building code, a permit was initially denied, resulting in litigation. The permit was finally provided, but only under a court order and then with the stipulation that there would be no plan check or city inspection, as it had become apparent during the trial that the city had no one qualified for such tasks.

The first structure completed on the steep sloping site was a tennis court featuring a post-tensioned concrete slab cantilevered over and some 20 ft (6.1 m) beyond a retaining wall. It was a noteworthy structure but the playing surface was horrible, with an uneven profile and surface finish. It certainly needed improvement, but I was concerned about cracking due to the nature of the structure as well as cantilever weight restrictions that limited thickness. The owner's designers agreed with me but he was adamant; he wanted it overlain with the nice surface he had seen on my other jobs. Money was not a

problem—just get started! I was adamant too. I did not think it was appropriate and refused.

Now, in those early days of business I really needed the work, especially a good-paying job like this would have been. And, additionally, I really didn't want to upset a potential client—which I also did! But, all was not lost. About a month later, the owner called. He was still unhappy at my refusal to redo the tennis court, but he really respected my *honesty* and felt assured that anything I did would be proper. And he was concerned about a repeat performance in placing and finishing the next structure—a post-tensioned thin shell with a 90 ft (27.4 m) span. Would I perform that work? And price... “charge what you must for the best possible product.” I would...and I did!

And then came the big prize, a 21 ft (6.4 m) wide helix-shaped roadway, cantilevered from a cylindrical prestressed masonry core. It was by far the most complex and daring of the three structures, a most intriguing undertaking, with a value greater than that of everything I had built to that time, combined. I hated to turn it down but *honestly* explained a lack of means for such a large project. Not to worry, a contract would be made that assured payment as the work proceeded and relieved me of any financial liabilities.

And so, my little firm became a bigger firm. And not on just any project, but one of high profile that was widely touted in the area at the time. Successful completion led to ever larger and more challenging work. And all because a struggling young contractor was *honest* with a perspective client and refused to do a job he felt was inappropriate.

Yes—*honesty pays*! It always has, and it always will. Let us be honest in all our endeavors!

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