

Who's Really On Your Job: The Six Roles Behind Every Build

And why, on a smaller project, the same one or two people are quietly doing all six jobs at once

AT A GLANCE

1. Every commercial construction project runs on six core functions: Project Manager, Superintendent, Project Engineer, Estimator, Safety Director, and MEP & Specialty Trades.
2. On a large commercial job, each function is a separate, dedicated person — sometimes a whole department.
3. On a smaller residential or light-commercial job, the same six functions still have to happen. They just get compressed onto one or two people wearing multiple hats.
4. Knowing which hats a contractor is wearing — and which ones nobody's wearing at all — is the single most useful question a client can ask before signing a contract.
5. The risk isn't that a small contractor does everything themselves. It's when a function gets dropped silently instead of consciously covered.

Ask most homeowners who's running their project and they'll say "my contractor." That answer hides six distinct jobs, each requiring a different skill set, and each one that gets skipped or under-covered is a specific, identifiable risk to the budget, the schedule, or the building itself. Understanding the six roles isn't an org-chart exercise — it's the fastest way to evaluate whether the person you're hiring actually has these bases covered.

The Six Core Roles

These are the same six functions on a \$50 million commercial tower and a \$150,000 home addition. What changes between them isn't the list of jobs that need doing — it's how many humans are doing them.

1. Project Manager (PM)

The business side of the project.

- Manages the master budget
- Handles contracts and approves financial change orders
- Serves as the main point of contact for the client and architects

2. Superintendent

The physical operations on the active job site.

- Schedules and coordinates subcontractors
- Enforces daily deadlines and manages material logistics
- Ensures building codes are met in the field

3. Project Engineer (PE)

The technical bridge between the field and the office.

- Manages the paperwork pipeline: RFIs, submittals, blueprint updates
- Owns quality-control documentation

4. Commercial Estimator (Preconstruction Manager)

The projected cost of the build, before a shovel touches dirt.

- Analyzes architectural blueprints to perform material takeoffs
- Solicits subcontractor bids and assembles competitive project proposals

5. Safety Director

OSHA compliance and site safety, full stop.

- Performs site inspections and leads safety briefings
- Holds the authority to halt work immediately to prevent an accident

6. MEP & Specialty Trades

The workforce that physically builds the project — the building's circulatory system and infrastructure.

- **Mechanical:** HVAC technicians and pipefitters installing heating, cooling, ventilation, and ductwork
- **Electrical:** commercial electricians installing power distribution, high-voltage wiring, lighting, and data lines
- **Plumbing:** water supply lines, sewage infrastructure, and gas piping
- **Other specialty trades:** ironworkers erecting structural steel, glaziers installing glass facades, concrete finishers

Why This Matters More on Smaller Jobs, Not Less

Large commercial general contractors staff all six roles as separate people because the contract value and liability justify it. A smaller residential renovation or single-building project can't support six full-time salaries — and shouldn't need to. But the six functions don't shrink just because the project does. They get compressed.

On a lean job, it's common and often perfectly reasonable for one person to run Project Manager and Estimator together — both are office-side, planning-and-budget functions that draw on the same skill set. It's equally common for a Superintendent to also carry Safety Director duties on a small crew, since both are field-side and hands-on. **The compression itself isn't the red flag.** The red flag is when a function disappears entirely instead of being consciously assigned to someone.

The pattern to watch for: Project Engineer and Safety Director are the two roles most often silently dropped on small jobs — not because they matter less, but because they don't look like "the contractor's real job" to someone running lean. When there's no PE function, RFIs and blueprint changes stop getting tracked in writing, and disputes later come down to memory instead of a paper trail. When there's no real Safety Director function, there's no one with the standing authority to actually stop work, even if the person running the job knows something's unsafe — because stopping the job is also stopping their own income for the day.

There's a second, subtler risk in compression: whoever's wearing two hats has an incentive to let one hat lose to the other under pressure. A Superintendent who's also the de facto Safety Director is deciding, in the moment, whether to slow down their own schedule for a safety call. A PM who's also the Estimator is checking their own original budget for accuracy. Neither is dishonest — it's just a structural conflict of interest that a fully staffed team doesn't have, because the Safety Director's only job is safety, with nothing else competing for their attention.

What This Means for You, As the Client

You don't need a fully staffed six-person team for a small project — you need to know exactly who's covering each of the six functions, and which ones, if any, aren't being covered at all. That's a fair, direct question to ask any contractor before signing anything.

Questions worth asking before you hire

1. Who prepared the estimate, and is that the same person managing my budget day to day? (If yes, ask who double-checks it.)
2. Who's tracking changes to the plans and any written requests for clarification — is there a paper trail, or does it live in someone's memory?
3. Who has the authority to stop work on my site if something looks unsafe, and is that person ever the same one under pressure to keep the schedule moving?
4. Are the MEP trades — mechanical, electrical, plumbing — licensed subcontractors or in-house, and who verifies their permits and inspections?
5. If my Superintendent is out sick for a week, who actually knows what's supposed to happen on my site that week?

Summary: What to Take Away

1. **Six functions run every project** — Project Manager, Superintendent, Project Engineer, Estimator, Safety Director, MEP & Trades — regardless of project size.
2. **Compression is normal on small jobs.** One or two people legitimately covering multiple roles isn't a red flag by itself.
3. **A silently dropped function is the real risk** — especially Project Engineer (paper trail) and Safety Director (stop-work authority).
4. **Dual-hatted roles create structural conflicts** — the person managing schedule and the person enforcing safety should ideally not always be the same person under the same pressure.
5. **The right question isn't "how big is your team"** — it's "who specifically covers each of these six things on my job."

Every Role, Covered — Not Compressed Into a Gap

Want to know exactly who covers what on your project? Ask us — we'll walk you through our team.

Ducere Construction Services, Inc. · (404) 565-0631 ·
www.koredeakinbami.com

Built on the Details.

Ducere Construction Services, Inc.

5925 Mulberry Street, Austell, GA 30168

(404) 565-0631 | www.koredeakinbami.com

General client education. This brief describes standard construction-industry role definitions and does not represent a commitment regarding staffing on any specific Ducere project; staffing varies by project size and scope and is discussed individually with each client.