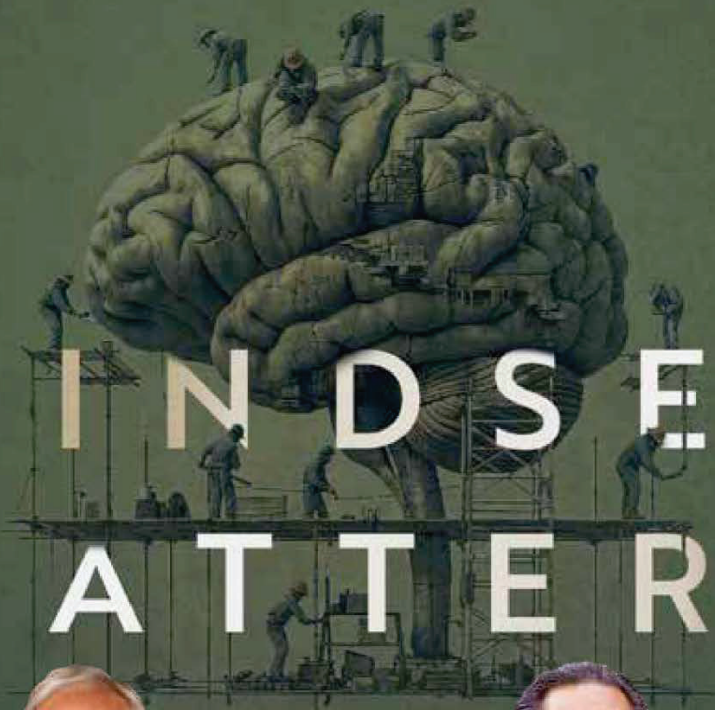


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THE ALOHA SPIRIT IN CONSTRUCTION

How Honesty and Kindness Helped a Company Grow

By Lance Luke

“The building repair was too expensive,” they said. “Besides,” they added, “it doesn’t look that bad.”

I hear that a lot in my line of work as a construction engineer in Hawaii. On the Hawaiian Islands of paradise, people think buildings last forever. They ignore signs of danger. After all, there are waves to conquer, beaches to explore, mountains to climb, and waterfalls to chase. Who has the time—or the money—to tackle every problem? We’re too busy having fun in the Hawaiian sun!

Honestly, though, we are all like that sometimes. We hear a “knocking sound” in the car’s engine and assume it will disappear. We feel a pain in a tooth and pray it’s just temporary.

We see a weed in the yard and think it’s likely the only one.

We tend to ignore problems. We place them in the back of our minds. We stubbornly fight to forget about them. As for preventive maintenance, who has time for that!

Of course, problems usually persist and often worsen. Similar to a small snowball cascading down the side of a cliff, they can grow into a more formidable force and soon, into an avalanche of chaos. The thump in the car’s engine may escalate into a critical mechanical failure. The tooth pain may be a warning sign of a significant cavity. The weed in the yard could be the first of hundreds.

And the crack in the wall could escalate into a structural compromise, endangering the stability of the entire building. It also could turn a nominal expense into a financial headache. That happened the day I visited the owners of a twenty-story condominium five blocks from Honolulu's beaches. The condo had an issue. I was contacted as the building expert.

It was like any other day in the Aloha State. A radiant yellow sun in a sky painted with hues of coral and azure had cast a golden glow over the turquoise waters of the Pacific. A gentle trade wind whispered through the swaying palm trees outside the condo, carrying the sweet scent of plumeria blossoms. The rhythmic sound of ocean waves served as a backdrop to the day's unfolding events. Honolulu's streets bustled with locals and visitors, each immersed in the island's laid-back atmosphere. It was a palate for the senses. Unfortunately, my diagnosis that day was not as pleasant as the island's natural charm.

After we exchanged smiles and handshakes, the owners led me to the corner of the high-rise condominium building. They were concerned. "What do you think?" one of them asked.

The condo, built five decades ago, had seen several small cracks growing larger through a concrete wall. I could easily fix it right then, but from their viewpoint it was worth delaying.

"How much will it cost to repair?"

"Perhaps...\$20,000," I replied. Their eyes grew big, as if I had told them a shocking secret.

"That's too expensive," one of them replied.

"It doesn't look too bad," said the other. "We'll wait." I smiled and shrugged, acknowledging the financial weight of the situation while not hiding the seriousness of the structural problem.

Two years later they called back. "We're ready to move forward with the repair."

But the problem had worsened. Like an untreated cavity, the once manageable cracks in the condo's concrete wall had expanded into something that would now cost far more to fix, estimated at

\$200,000. In barely twenty-four months, the cost of the repair had grown tenfold. No doubt, it would be expensive.

I took no joy in sharing the shocking news. But I had been honest—a trait that has served me well in my work. It's been a key to my success. I want to shoot straight with people. I want my word to be my bond. If the structure has minimal problems—or no issues—I acknowledge it. Yet if major repairs are necessary, I dare not remain silent.

This commitment to honesty is a professional strategy and a reflection of my core values. I strive for transparency and integrity in an industry where advice can sometimes be ambiguous, if not plain dishonest. If done with compassion, being forthright by delivering tough news is the only real response. It even may include acknowledging when things haven't gone as planned. After all, demonstrating humility is not a sign of weakness but a sign of authenticity.

The construction management profession requires honesty—*needs* honesty. Trust between the condo managers and me is necessary for problems to be solved and buildings to be properly repaired. If significant issues are not inspected and repaired as they occur, then major safety problems can quickly arise. A condo with an unrepaired crack can fall apart and endanger its occupants.

The potential danger isn't theoretical.

In 2021 ninety-eight people died when a twelve-story condominium in Surfside, Florida, collapsed. Investigators blamed the tragedy on a “severe structural deficiency” in its pool deck that did not meet building codes. The building was forty years old.

In 2023 three people died in Davenport, Iowa, when a six-story apartment complex partially collapsed. There, investigators blamed the incident on improper support for a wall that was under construction.

In 2017 four people died and thirteen were injured, including an emergency worker, when a thirty-six-story condo in Honolulu caught fire. The units did not have a sprinkler system.

Thankfully, I was not involved in any of those tragedies. But my life's goal is to ensure similar catastrophes don't occur on my watch.

A condo owner with decades-old cast iron pipes called once, asking my advice on stopping the frequent leaks.

"Replace all the pipes in your building," I told him.

"We don't have the money for that," he responded.

Several months later a main pipe burst in his building, impacting twenty units and leading to \$500,000 in repairs. I call it "stepping over a dollar to pick up a penny." Too often condo owners kick the proverbial can down the road, believing the repairs can wait. When problems escalate, insurance companies cancel policy coverage and rates go up.

My family instilled in me the value of honesty from an early age. They also handed down a passion for construction.

My grandfather and uncle were involved in real estate, a popular career path in Chinese culture. I am Chinese Hawaiian, and in that society you don't purchase real estate to sell it—you purchase real estate to make money to buy more. Renting is king in our Chinese culture.

My grandfather owned multiple rental properties, placing me and my brother in charge of maintaining them. It was educational on-the-job training that taught us many skills, including carpentry, roofing, plumbing, and electrical wiring—all while we were in our teens. I repaired houses as my friends played on the beach and surfed the waves. I was a skinny twelve-year-old who painted walls, nailed shingles, fixed floors, and stopped leaks. Sure, I found time to go surfing too, but I also learned valuable skills that laid the groundwork for my future.

Back then, there was no Google or YouTube. You learned construction by trial and error. My brother and I often took a pipe or electrical wire to the hardware store, asking the workers for advice on how to complete that day's task. We needed their knowledge and how-to. Thankfully, they were more than willing to assist.

After earning my civil engineering degree in college and my real estate license, my uncle—the state’s largest real estate developer—hired me as his construction manager. We built high-rise buildings and condominiums. We constructed subdivisions. During my ten years working under him I learned everything I could. It was a natural transition to launching my own company, Construction Management Inspection LLC.

Advice from my father has been my foundation. “What’s the secret to success?” I asked him once, expecting a lecture about education or hard work.

His answer surprised me: “Helping people.” If you do that, he said, then money will follow. In Hawaii we call it the “aloha spirit.” We lead with love. My goal in life isn’t to make money. It’s to help people.

Like a well-crafted tool, I’ve built my business on three basic precepts: (1) helping others, (2) being kind, and (3) displaying honesty. With over four decades under my belt as a construction manager and successful business owner, it’s safe to say my father’s philosophy has proved true.

One time the governing board of a condo association called and asked if I could look at their building and advise them on potential maintenance and upgrades.

“Of course,” I responded.

I walked around the property with the building manager and several board members, pointing out a few problems and suggesting possible fixes. I took pictures and wrote notes. A few days later I sent the board an official report, expecting a call back to schedule the largely minor repairs.

They didn’t call back. Until, that is, five years later. “We’re ready to get the work done,” one of the board members said. It had been so long that I nearly responded, “Who are you?” But then I remembered.

“What made you call me back?” I asked.

“You’re the only building inspector who gave us an honest

opinion,” the woman said. “Everyone else gave us a sales pitch and quoted their hourly rate. Others tried to pressure us.”

My honesty had led to a \$120,000 contract—half a decade after they first called.

My only “sales pitch” was kindness and honesty. This approach has helped me find a niche in the Hawaii market of inspecting and managing construction for properties, condominiums, and buildings. It’s an approach I use with the competition as well. I’m friends with my competitors. We meet for lunch and share ideas. We don’t argue or fight. Instead, we laugh and collaborate, recognizing that mutual respect and camaraderie contribute to a better construction industry.

“I don’t have anything to hide,” I often tell them.

Sometimes they give me a puzzled look, wondering why I sound so different from other managers. I tell them this: “We don’t need money-hungry, fly-by-night operators. We need honest, competent people in every industry, especially among construction managers.” I tell the younger ones, “One day I’ll retire, and maybe you’ll take over.”

My clients have my cell phone number, and I answer their calls as a first priority. I don’t want them waiting on answers.

When a project begins, I’m on site, at dawn, when the construction workers arrive. I don’t hand the leadership to someone else, but I don’t micromanage, either. Clients sometimes have differing views with the contractors—and vice versa—and it is my job to bring about a solid understanding of the project’s scope and to forge an agreement. Although I represent the client owner or condominium board, it is my job to clearly communicate the work progress, complete the project on time in cooperation with contractors, and get them paid on time as promised.

I go to bat for my clients. Once, after helping a town-house complex client install new top-of-the-line roofing, I noticed a strange white powder atop the shingles. I did not know what it was. The manufacturer’s representative didn’t, either.

“It’ll wash off in the rain,” he assured me. “Give it six months.”

But six months later the white stain had not vanished.

“Give it another year,” the roofing rep told me.

I was skeptical but nevertheless agreed to wait another twelve months. A year later that white stain had not disappeared. Once again, I contacted the roof representative.

“We’re filing a warranty claim against the manufacturer, alleging the shingles are defective,” I told him.

I wanted to see a wrong made right. Months later, and after dozens of emails, I was preparing to send a shingle sample to a laboratory for testing when—suddenly—the roofing manufacturer changed its mind and relented. Long story short, the town houses were given new roofs, saving the owners \$275,000.

The key to success is simple. It’s the same precepts we were taught growing up. Help others. Be kind. Stay honest. If you do that, success will follow.

About Lance



Celebrity Expert, Hawaii Building Expert

Lance Luke has been in the construction industry for over forty-three years. He is a former general contractor and worked as a construction and project manager for real estate development companies. Currently he owns an independent construction consulting company, Construction Management Inspection LLC. His experience is in design, construction inspections, construction management, reserve studies, and real estate development. He is a sought-after national building expert.

Lance has held the following designations for many years:

- Certified Construction Inspector (CCI)
- Certified Construction Project Manager (CCPM)
- Certified Construction Consultant (CCC)

Lance serves as an expert witness on construction and real estate litigation cases. He was formally an advisory board member for the State of Hawaii Regulated Industries Complaints Office, as an expert consultant (for over fifteen years). His expertise was in helping to resolve complaints filed with the Contractors License Board.

He has written numerous articles on construction and inspection, which are published in both local and national print media. He conducts up to eighty presentations a year to the construction, real estate, and property management industry, including educational webinars and seminars.

Lance is an approved federal HUD construction inspector. He is also listed as one of America's Premier Experts and Marquis Who's Who in America 70th Anniversary Edition. He is also a business mentor, a community-service volunteer, a professional speaker, and a two-time best-selling author.

Lance is a former member of the Structural Engineers Association of Hawaii and the American Bar Association, serving on the Real Property/Probate Law Division and the Forum for the Construction Industry. He is a current member of the National Fire Protection Association.

Lance is also an owner of several other firms that include a digital marketing company, a publishing company, a business directory, an

AI company, a VA services provider, and a university that offers online classes.

His two webinar series have a loyal and growing following: askbuildingexpert.now.site and askmarketingexperts.now.site.

He is an award-winning movie producer and is currently working on producing long- and short-form videos for his various business ventures and his clients.

Lastly, he is a professional musician and plays guitar in a music group called Kolea. The group plays songs ranging from Broadway tunes and jazz standards to bossa nova and classic contemporary music.

