



DEADLINE!



HOW PREMIER ORGANIZATIONS
WIN THE RACE AGAINST TIME



DAN CARRISON COAUTHOR OF *SEMPER FI:*
BUSINESS LEADERSHIP THE MARINE CORPS WAY

“That’s when we found out from the city,” grimaces Emil Konrath, the Turner veteran chosen to bring this enormous project in on time, “that we weren’t going to get all of our land at once.” In fact, access to nearly three-quarters of the property on which the stadium was to be built was being denied by the city. The design-build team, which had quite naturally anticipated complete control of all of the site—how else could you build a stadium?—was shocked. They were told the land issues would be settled in the “near future,” but the clock had begun ticking. While their start date continued to move, in the wrong direction, the one constant that never moved was the end date.

There were a number of reasons for the delay in the availability of the land, none of them of much consolation to a design-build team ready to “blow and go.” For one, the city had not yet completed the necessary transactions with the various owners of several land parcels and did not seem to be in any particular hurry to do so. Secondly, McNichols Arena, home to the Denver Nuggets and the Colorado Avalanche, had been contracted, unbeknownst to Turner, for a number of concerts and events well into the winter. Turner had planned to demolish the thirty-year-old arena months earlier; it was in the way; now they had to live with it and work around it. And thirdly, Turner learned that venerable Mile High Stadium, also in the way and slated for early demolition, was to remain standing as a safety net, should they fail to meet the August 2001 opening date.

So Turner found itself denied the very land it needed to build the new stadium the traditional way, as an oval spiraling up, and, to the extent to which it *could* build, it must do so in the claustrophobic proximity of not one, but two, existing stadiums.

That is when Emil Konrath had a general contractor’s equivalent of *satori*, the moment of enlightenment said to come to Buddhist monks who have mediated long and hard. Not exactly the monkish type, Konrath stared at the problem long and hard, calling up his nearly three decades of bare-knuckle high-rise construction experience with Turner. Then, the answer came to him. HNTB’s Lance Nichols remembers the drama of Konrath’s solution. “Instead of building the stadium the way all stadiums have been built for the last one hundred

years—as one complete, recognizable oval, coming out of the ground, level by level—it occurred to Emil that the stadium could be looked upon as *eight interconnected five-story buildings*. When he pointed this out to us, we suddenly realized we didn't have to build the whole thing, level by level; we could build it by sections, going all the way to the top. We only had the land for three out of the eight sections available to us, but we could at least start there."

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Konrath's solution was like baking a pie one complete, perfect, succulent slice at a time. No stadium had ever been constructed in such a fashion; but, then again, no contractor had ever been denied access to three-quarters of the site on start day. Many months later, the land parcels would eventually be transferred, and permission would be granted to demolish McNichols Arena. If the design-build team had waited for that day to begin construction—and *no one could have blamed them* for insisting on possession of all the site—they never would have made the deadline. "The problem is," says Emil, "that even if you have a legitimate reason for not delivering on time, and God knows we had a good reason, all people would remember would be that Turner didn't deliver. I couldn't allow that to happen. If we were going to make the deadline, we had to start *somewhere*, we just couldn't wait."

It is said that the subcontinent Greenland is so named because its discoverer, Eric the Red, wanted to attract settlers from his homeland. The hardy Viking men and women who were lured by the visions of verdant pastures found themselves confronted with a frozen wasteland, and, no doubt, a fast-talking Eric the Red. Anybody who has been in business for a few years has experienced the sensation of landing on similar shores—perhaps a sales territory that did not quite live up to the loving descriptions of management, or a "key account" that turned out to be run by the CEO from hell. At such times we find ourselves nodding our heads in agreement with the inner voice that warned us not to sell the house and relocate or take on the new challenge of key account manager.