

WHAT TO DO WHEN THINGS DON'T GO TO PLAN

By **Arsh Ellahi**

Hi Arsh,

I read your articles and I like the way you say it. Everyone seems to be on a lucky streak ... well, everyone but ME.

Things aren't exactly going to plan so far, this year. What would you do to get yourself back on track?

Can you help point me in the right direction?

MR G – CHELTENHAM

Thanks for getting in touch, Mr G. You've come to the right person as I am the self-appointed King of Correction. I find things go wrong all the time and like yourself, sometimes feel deflated and question whether the issue is me or what I am doing.

Let me put something in simple terms – no-one is perfect. Mistakes happen, and mistakes also cost time and money. You have to ensure that you do not continue to make the same mistakes. I will try to elaborate in a practical example shortly.

You may have read previously that I am currently part way through a small development of six one-bedroom apartments. I have been in the property industry for approximately 19 years, and have done loads of developments from HMOs to large-scale housing developments. So in theory, this development should be a breeze ... **WRONG!**

The building I purchased is Grade II listed and in a conservation area. I know a fair few things about conserving historic features. The building in question had quite a few issues, ie all the windows were mainly UPVC and beyond repair.

As a result, I was led to believe that they could be replaced on a like-by-like basis. The building also had concrete tiles, but the whole roof had collapsed prior to purchase. Again, I thought we could replace like for like.

I ordered brand new windows. After confirming the design and placing the order, I was called to site by the builders, informing me that the conservation officer had popped by to say hello.

At the point of visit, the roof had already been ripped off and had been replaced with new concrete tiles. Again, I assumed that like for like was acceptable. Little did I know that the conservation officer wanted the property to return to its natural heritage look. When I enquired what he expected, he went on to state that an original Victorian building in the area would have natural Welsh slate tiles.

I spent the next few days back and forth with him on email sharing pictures of what was on the building prior to purchase. His response was simple. As I was refurbishing a property with Grade II listing, it had to return to its former heritage look. Which meant Welsh slate tiles on the roof. He also stated that he would not accept artificial or Spanish slate.

I started researching the required tile to find that natural Welsh slate costs at least £7 per tile, and I needed approximately 5,000 tiles. This minor mistake could prove to become a very large one, costing me in excess of £35,000.

At this point, I had already purchased the concrete tiles, which costed circa £5,000, plus labour.

To add further insult to injury, the conservation officer started to look at the windows and asked my intentions. I showed the design and order of the windows, and he instantly responded that he would not accept any form of UPVC in the property. My heart sank. This could potentially cost another £20,000.

My mistakes, or should I say my naivety, had cost me circa £60,000 – which will be a massive dent in profits and possibly make the project unviable.

The project came to a standstill whilst we resolved this issue. It felt like everything was going wrong, but I knew there had to be a solution.

I looked at the project and understood what the conservation officer wanted:

He wanted an old building to be retained in good repair.

I needed to find old items to fit the building ... but where would I find such items?

I started searching the internet for reclamation yards nationwide for Welsh slate tiles. I found several companies where I could purchase them from as little as £1.80 per tile. Coming in at a total of £9,000, this was a massive saving from the original £35,000.

But I still felt that it was expensive. I spoke to quite a few companies to see if we could get them any cheaper, but without success.

I eventually started looking on eBay. I found a listing for a load of Welsh slate tiles left over from a job. I enquired and he wanted £1.20 a tile. Although this was great news, I kept searching.

One week later, the eBay seller contacted me saying that he needed to get rid of them and was now open to offers. After a day of negotiating, I managed to get the price down to £0.68 per tile, on the basis that they were collected within 24 hours and that I paid cash on collection to avoid eBay and PayPal charges.

I had learnt my lesson and before confirming the purchase, checked with the conservation officer that these tiles satisfied his requirements. And they ticked all the boxes.



I rounded up a few drivers and three long-wheel-based transit vans. We drove up to Nottingham and collected the tiles that evening. I was over the moon with the fact that I had just salvaged one part of the project. Plus, I managed to sell the concrete tiles to my builder who needed them for another job. The roof came back in on budget.

My next challenge was the windows. I had just agreed an order of £15,000 of UPVC windows. I arranged a meeting with the conservation officer again to see how we could salvage the window order. I always find it is best to speak face to face rather than over the phone.

I showed the officer that the houses on either side of mine had UPVC windows, and anything different would make mine stand out negatively. For almost two hours, we explored all options of wooden, UPVC wooden grain, etc, and eventually came up with a compromise.

He agreed to allow the back wing of the property to have wood-grain UPVC windows, which had been ordered. But he still wanted wooden sash boxes for the three large windows of the main building.

Having looked at a quote from a window company, I would still lose approximately £5,000. But I believe this was a battle that I couldn't win.

We agreed on the basis that I kept him in the loop with future materials and so far, the project is now back on track.

So as you can see Mr G – things do not always go to plan. But the strong willed and those who are prepared to react and respond positively will always survive.

You need to be willing to also accept blame where required, as I did with the roof and windows, and find the root of the issue to find a solution. In the scenario above, I understood that the old building needed old items, and that was the key bit of information.

My challenge was then to find old materials at the right price.

This project could have very easily gotten out of hand and potentially lost money if I did not react in the manner that I did. My business partner at one point told me to just "order the bloody new tiles!" This would have cost us £35,000 ... but part of being a problem solver is being resilient to negativity, especially when you are already feeling down!

On this project, the issue seemed to be me. I proceeded without consulting anyone which cost me both money and time, but eventually managed to limit the damages by taking the time out to find suitable solutions.

TOP TIPS ON WHAT TO DO WHEN THINGS DON'T GO TO PLAN:

- 1 DON'T PANIC! Breathe and take a step back**
- 2 Understand the root of the issue**
- 3 Understand why it is happening**
- 4 Explore all options. It is far too easy to just go for the first solution**
- 5 Speak to people who may be able to help**

I could go through loads of different scenarios where the s**t has hit the fan, yet I am still here to tell the tale.

Tomorrow is another day. At the time, it feels as though everything is falling in on you, but believe me ... **THERE IS ALWAYS A SOLUTION.**

I really hope this article helps you and other YPN readers.

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