

Remodeling Office for Growing Grounds

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This Dissertation is about my first real re-condition project for a portion of an office space for Growing Grounds Farm here in San Luis Obispo. The purpose of this essay is to look back onto my experience and see how much I struggled and learned, and how I can benefit from it in the future. Throughout my project, I made sure there was constant communication between myself and Craig Wilson, program manager for Growing Grounds Farm, with clarifications and several updates. I made sure to fit and complete the project within my tight schedule and adjust it throughout the process. Throughout the project there were several building adaptations and tweaks I had to make in this unique space in order to install, and build out an office safely and efficiently. There were some new and difficult experiences for me that I had to learn for the first time as I was constructing the new office space. Throughout this process, I had a new appreciation and gained more sympathy for those who do this work on a daily basis

Key Words: Communication, Installation, Schedule, Adapting, Efficiency

Introduction

Project Description/Deliverables

This Project was a proposal by Craig Wilson at Growing Grounds for the Cal Poly CM 420 class that nobody chose to do. I took that idea and wanted to do this as my senior project, so I got it approved and immediately reached out to Craig. The project description from Craig in the CM 420 packet was to “demo and reinstall flooring with tile, new window, and walls redone inclusive of a pocket door. No permit required.” When I saw this, it was perfect for me because I really wanted to do a project-based project to further exercise my construction knowledge and building skills. This front room was to be turned into an office space that could be closed off for privacy. The floors needed a new subfloor due to rot and excessive use. The walls were to be fully prepped for paint. There was one window already installed that needed to be ripped out and replaced with a new one; there was an A/C unit in another wall that needed to be taken out and replaced with a new window as well. One of the interior walls had large openings through it to another office room that needed to be covered up and filled in with insulation as a sound barrier. On that same load-bearing wall, a doorway existed that needed to be opened up more so a new door could be installed. A new wall had to be installed with a sliding pocket door so the room could be completely closed off.

Project Purpose

The purpose of this project was to convert the open, front room into a private office space. Originally, this area was more of a storage space for a desk, filing cabinets, miscellaneous items, and an area for the employees to talk to people coming through. The area was mostly wasted space for them because they already have an area for them to talk to customers and fill out orders as needed. They really wanted this space to be re-conditioned into a space that would better their needs, as well as provide a private space for someone to use and close off for privacy. Reference Figure 1 to see the initial room layout prior to any work being done.



Figure 1: Before Picture of Project Space

Key Factors

Communication

Communication was a key factor throughout the project. Throughout the process I would talk with Craig about updates, issues and clarifications, and materials. I am fortunate to own and have most of the tools and equipment needed for this project. For materials like trowels for the drywall mud, joint tape, screws, nails, building supplies, etc. I needed to let Craig know so he could provide me with the right equipment needed for me to do the work. He, representing Growing Grounds, also funded the entire project when it came to the building materials. With me not having a truck to get the materials to bring to the site, I created a list of materials to give to Craig so he could get the materials and bring them for installation. During each day, I would let Craig know what work I was planning on doing for the next couple times I would come, in order for him to get a chance to go out and bring the materials as needed. He was a great help with supplying the materials needed in a timely manner that I was unable to bring or supply myself.

Installation

Installation was also a key factor, as it was the entire project. I had to make sure I constructed everything correctly and efficiently. I say efficiently because I had limited time to work on this project with my schedule. I was only available a few hours a week to be there and complete all the work needed. In total, the project took me roughly 50 hours from the start of planning with Craig, to the end of the trim work around the doors with only a little bit of help on the framing and window installment. Fortunately for me, the area is about a one-hundred square foot space. It made it a little cramped at times, but it was a great starting project for me and gave me a better taste of what I want to do in the future. The room was very oddly shaped which didn't help with the installation of windows, doors, or the framing. Nothing was level or plumb, and a main concern was that there was an existing outlet right where my new wall was going. I had to cut open that portion of the wall and move the outlet out of the way so it wouldn't be covered up by the new wall. The ceiling is also slanted at an angle which made framing a little interesting. I had to frame the wall in place because of how small the room was and how it was shaped. Also with my schedule, I knew I wouldn't have time to complete the finish flooring. Craig was nice enough to tell me not to worry about the flooring before I even realized I didn't have time. He said he would have someone who did the rest of the floors come in and complete that work to stay consistent with the rest of the office space.

Lessons Learned

Communication

I always knew communication is the key to a successful project, but I have never really experienced to the full extent on my own. Through internships I had a lot of communication and coordination I was responsible for, but I didn't really have a super timely issue I had to deal with. This project was super timely and I had to make sure I stayed on a tight schedule and work efficiently. Communication was very important, mostly for the schedule and supplies. I had to come up with a generic schedule when I would be working on what and when. Like I said above, the funding and materials came straight from Craig. With that, I had to give Craig constant reminders and updates with what I was doing next and what materials I would need because they couldn't hold all of the materials for the entirety of the project, so Craig would go out and get the necessary materials just before I would come in and install or work on whatever the task was. He was very generous in getting the materials there in a timely manner throughout the project. I only had to do a few last-minute calls to get a few supplies I needed for that day. What I soon realized was that constant reminders and updates are key, and you can't rely on one schedule or plan to carry throughout the project. If I only gave Craig one 'heads-up' at the beginning of the project, I would most likely be still working on finishing this up. You can never rely on others to know what you are planning to do or the work you are doing and know what your schedule is because it always changes.

Installation

Another important aspect I learned on my first day was that nothing previously built is perfect and you have to accommodate for minor, or even major at times, imperfections and must work with what is dealt. On my first day when I was installing the new subfloor, I noticed that the floors and walls were far from perfect. The floor and joists below was rotted away in some areas and not level at all. It made screwing down the floor a little difficult because at certain areas there was nothing to screw down into. Because the floors and joists below were already weak, I chose to lay the new subfloor on top of the existing subfloor for more strength and to ensure a sturdier floor. I also realized that the walls were not parallel or even straight. This made my cuts for the new subfloor a little more work than I thought. I thought I would just be able to measure the area and make a few cuts on the sheets of plywood. I was very wrong. I had to measure and figure out each sheet on a separate occasion and deal with *everything* on its own. This matter also made framing interesting. The way I measured and cut the studs for the framed walls was accounting for level floors. When I went to put the studs and headers in, they were not level at the top. I, at first, installed the header over the sliding pocket door and took a step back and it looked funny. I took a level to the header and it was far off, even though the trimmer studs were the exact same height. I had to raise a few more inches to a side to make it level. This same issue was for the windows. I figured, I'd be able to take out the existing windows and just frame in to fit a new one. Again, I had to go through and shim both the sides and the bottom to make sure my new windows would fit and be level. There was a lot more fixing of older problems than I originally figured and accounted for. It was pretty time-consuming to go through everything and re-make sure that everything was plumb and level before I could do my work. Reference Figure 2 to see the final framing of the new wall, including the pocket door framing. I was definitely worried about how sound the wall will be considering most of the wall is the pocket door opening, but after it was all tied in and added some drywall, it made it a lot sturdier.



Figure 2: New wall framing with pocket door

This project was also my first time installing a sliding pocket door. It was really interesting and much different when it came to the framing aspect. There are certain pieces, lengths and heights that must be met in order for the door to fit and function correctly. It was definitely time consuming to learn as I built it, but now that I know the general idea on how to do it, I can easily install more in the future with ease and in much less time. I've also never done a tape and mud job on the drywall when it came to intersections from the wall to the ceiling or from the wall to another wall. I've done patch jobs and whatnot, but never major joints like that. I went out and bought myself a corner trowel and that made a huge difference. I started with an intersection with a normal trowel, but it took a while and was a little difficult. At that moment I went out to buy a new trowel to come back and finish and it helped tremendously with time, efficiency, and cleanliness. I've also never had to do drywall up to and around a window and do the tape and mud in a section like that. Again, the first run through was pretty time consuming and took a while, but when I went back for the second coat, it went much faster.

How I will Apply This Project to Future Work

There are several aspects just from this small job that I will remember and will take with me into my future with construction, both for a general contractor, as well as future projects of my own on the side. In the future, I'd like to retire and flip homes, so with that, this was a great first experience to get me exposed to some work that I will come across in the future. I did a lot of useful framing, *a lot* of drywall work with taping and mudding, window work, installing different types of doors in areas that were not close to plumb or level, and some minor electrical work. Overall, this had a wide range of scope and it gives me a better idea and appreciation for those in the field who do this work daily. I realized how much of a pain it was to deal with existing conditions that were not great, especially when I had to fix previous issues before I could do what I wanted. I realized with work like this, nothing is perfect and you must work with what is given and make the best of it. I realized that certain subs have this issue every day, where they work after another sub and have to deal with the existing work and still have to get their work done. I definitely now have more sympathy for subs that deal with this and will be lenient when they have an issue with dealing with somebody else's work.

I also have sympathy for subs, especially drywall subs, who have a taxing task to hang drywall, do the taping and mudding, then sanding it and getting it right to look acceptable and ready for paint. It's difficult and takes a lot of time to get right. Also, sanding the mud is extremely messy and is very dry when breathing in. The first day I didn't have a mask and I inhaled some of that dust for sure. I felt how thick it was in my mouth and throat and made sure I was constantly drinking water. When I left the project at the end of the day, I was completely covered in white dust everywhere, especially my hair, even though I was wearing a hat. I made sure I brought a mask for the next time sanding because I know it is not healthy to breath in, even though several people do this every single day. It can be

very taxing on the body and health and I realize that so much more now. Reference Figure 3 to see the wall after it is taped and mudded up at the joints and over the screw holes.



Figure 3: Drywall with Tape and Mud at Joints

I also realized that even with small projects, schedules change all the time. Mine did, and it was a really small project. I didn't account for all the work I had to do in order to make the walls, floors, or openings ready and acceptable to do the work I needed to. Because it is very easy to delay a schedule or have conditions come up that make you do more work than you thought, I made sure to communicate with Craig daily to let him know where I was at and what I was planning on doing next. Constant reminders and updates are the best way to keep people in the loop and to have everybody on the same page. I wanted to make sure Craig knew exactly where I was at throughout the process even though his office is right next to where I was working and he could easily see what I was doing.

Conclusion

I loved this project, even though it was difficult and a little frustrating at times. I think it was an incredible learning experience for me. I am really satisfied with the final product and fortunate to have the opportunity to practice what I love to do and what I hope to do in the future. This project had a large enough scope for me to experience several different aspects of construction as to what goes into a space of a building and putting it all together. Later in life I hope to do this on a much larger scale, but I am very happy that I was able to further my knowledge and experience on a smaller project like this, where I could help somebody else, before diving into a larger project.

Future Work Ideas

Growing Grounds Farm is always looking for work to be done. I know I wasn't able to get to the flooring, but Craig mentioned that they will have that done by someone who works for them and who did the rest of the flooring. Just by walking around, they have several structures that seem like they should be re-conditioned, or even re-built. They have some older structures that aren't very strong anymore. They are also always looking for some shade structures to cover plants, or even have as work areas. They are also very accepting to landscape work, like bridges, patios, water irrigation systems, and much more. Project opportunities are endless here at Growing Grounds. They are also likely to fund the project, like they did for mine, as they are a non-profit and all the proceeds go back into the farm and improving the grounds.