

The Builder's Engineer

Does Halfwit Plus Halfwit Equal Fullwit?



By **Tim Garrison**,
CEO ConstructionCalc.com

In the movie *Dumb and Dumber*, the product of two halfwits equaled a one-fourth wit... if they were lucky. This makes good engineering sense because $\frac{1}{2}$ times $\frac{1}{2}$ does equal $\frac{1}{4}$.

But what about the *sum* of $\frac{1}{2} + \frac{1}{2}$? That equals one, right?

I share office space with an attorney friend, Kevin. We frequently work together on land development projects. The other day I was roughing out a simple joint access agreement whereby road construction costs would be shared between our development and a neighboring property. I had it pretty well hammered out except for one nagging issue.

“Kevin,” I said, breaking the white silence of our office and wrenching him, no doubt, from some highly important legal task. I felt a little guilty about bugging him, but not too much because he often pesters me with technical questions. “I’m having trouble deciding the timeframe of this road agreement. See, if we get access through this neighbor’s property, we’ll have to do a deal right away. But, it could be that we get a new access from the east, in which case this agreement would be wasted.”

“Hmm,” he puzzled, coming over to take a seat by my desk. “... and what is the downside of doing nothing at this time?”

This elementary question made me pause. I hadn’t really thought through all the what-ifs. As our conversation expanded, it became clear that my seemingly simple access agreement had nuances, branches, and if-thens I hadn’t considered. After an hour of dissecting we had the crux nailed down, which to my surprise was not even part of my original thinking.

As he strolled back to his desk we joked that luckily there are two of us halfwits in the office because together we make a fullwit... barely. Ha ha!

Truly though, what if Kevin wasn’t there? What if I was a Lone Ranger, never needing the assistance of anyone? There is no doubt my finished products would not be as good as with an extra set of eyes and ears. Heck, the Lone Ranger really wasn’t alone anyway; he had Tonto, not to mention his trusty steed, HiYo-Silver or whatever.

So, what about you? It doesn't matter what line of work you're in, there are many, many fine opportunities to get advice and assistance from someone else. Are you too proud to ask?

It's funny, the ones who most need advice are usually the least likely to ask. I recall a young engineer, we'll call him "Tim", who thought that because there was this title, "Engineer" attached to his name, he certainly must know everything about everything. And so he blundered through the first years of his career striving valiantly to hoodwink people into believing he really did know everything. Of course, he fooled no one and instead after the foolies stopped chuckling behind his back, were sure never to hire him again. The ironic part is now that I, uh, I mean "Tim" is one of the foolies; he understands and expects folks *not* to know everything – particularly young folks. And if they simply fess up about their shortcomings, "Tim" is very impressed with their honesty and much more likely to hire and rehire them than if they try to snowjob him.

Bottom line: Two sound minds *are* better than one. Don't be shy about asking for a little advice or peer review when you need it. Wasn't it John Wayne who so eloquently said: "Life is hard. But it's a lot harder if you're dumb."

Tim Garrison of ConstructionCalc.com, is a professional engineer, author, and software producer for the building industry. Send e-mail to buildersengineer@constructioncalc.com. Tim reads every one.