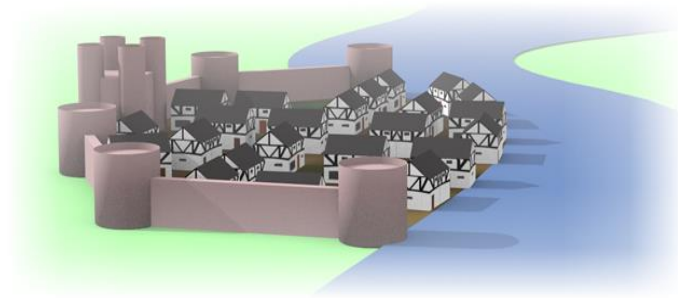


The professional's tale

Once, as old stories tell us, the inhabitants of a certain town needed to cross the river to work in the fields beyond, the nearest crossing was many miles away. They had tried to build a bridge, or run a boat but the width and speed of the flow thwarted each attempt. The council decided to hire a specialist to work out what to do. This person looked at the layout of the river banks, the depth of the river, the peak flood levels and asked people how many times a day they might want to cross. The specialist and talked to the councillor about how much they wanted to spend. The town planner took a keen interest, he'd never solved the river crossing problem, but



he been laying out streets and building houses for many years. The specialist started to draw plans for a custom type of ferry: picking a size of boat that would serve the needs of the town-folk; working out where piers were to be sunk; and the strength of a chain needed to withstand the highest likely flood. During this process the specialist worked with the town planner, asking advice about the strength of the banks and which streets would be easiest to widen. Nevertheless the town planner started to get frustrated, when he suggested things sometimes the specialist would add them into the plans but other times would mutter that there were some parts that just had to be built a certain way or the whole scheme would fail. The town planner couldn't see why some of his ideas got added but others got rejected. One week, while the specialist was away, the town planner went to the workshop and grabbed all the drawings. He simplified them, taking away some things and replacing others, the costly chain, for example, was substituted with rope that the town planner was sure would be sufficient. Once he had drawn up the new plans for a less complex and expensive version he threw away the original drawings. When the specialist returned he was rather surprised to find that his carefully assembled, but incomplete, plans were now gone. The specialist tried to explain, for example, that the chain was an essential component of his scheme and couldn't be replaced by a rope, but the town planner was not swayed. The specialist also claimed that, to him, these new plans appeared to be a mishmash of some of the bits of his old design but with many of the crucial parts omitted. He said the new scheme might work, but if the town council wanted to follow this changed approach then they needed to take advice from someone who had some faith in it. "But we hired you to build a river crossing", said the councillors, "this new design has similar parts to the one you were drawing, can't you just tell us what we need to do to make **this** work?" The specialist said that the new design was so different that his honest opinion was they should go back to his original version. Of course, the town planner has the final say, even in fairy tales customers are always right, if they insist on rope then rope it must be.

What would you do? In my opinion, anyone who considers themselves to be a professional, really has no choice. No one ever wants to give up something they've worked hard on, and disappointing the good people of the town (or any other client) is always hard. Some might allow their need for income to overcome their qualms, but a professional has to have a point at which they refuse to participate in work that they believe will not deliver a quality result.