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## 'FLYING ISN'T PARTICULARLY DANGEROUS. IT'S CRASHING THAT'S DANGEROUS...'

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'Flying isn't particularly dangerous. It's crashing that's dangerous...'\*

15 Oct 2012



### JANE PRICE-STEVENS, INTERIOR DESIGNER

Helicopters maintain a precarious equilibrium when they are in the air – and it's the most beautiful thing to look at when it works... when one of the elements that comprise this equilibrium changes, it has an impact on all the other elements and either something changes (altitude, pitch, direction, speed) or you need to compensate to maintain the status quo or to make the entire system work more effectively. However, when just one thing goes disastrously wrong, the whole thing just comes crashing down. So, where am I going with this and why are helicopter crashes just like interior design? I'll start at the beginning...

My husband and I are in the process of deciding whether to embark on a total refurbishment of our home – finally!!! So, as you might imagine, we are currently debating the upheaval this will potentially cause (particularly for our very large and stupid dog and our very large and eccentric cat), working out whether we have sufficient funds in the coffers to do the work and, ultimately, deciding whether we should move out of our home while the works are taking place.

Now, given that my husband is going to be my client on this project (and I suspect he may be a very demanding client), I think it is important that we decide early (i.e. before we commence work) what our priorities are in terms of cost, time and quality. This is where I was going with the helicopter bit. Bear with me.

So, as you might imagine;

The **time** refers to the amount of time available to complete a project

The **cost** refers to the budgeted amount available to fund all aspects of the project

The **quality** refers to the quality of the final build and finish

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I have seen several projects where the client has not fully appreciated the significant interrelationship between these three fundamental elements of a project and therefore makes decisions relating to one without appreciating the consequential impact on the other two. The time cost quality triangle is a useful concept to bear in mind throughout your build and you'll find that, once you are aware of it, it will pop into your head in all sorts of situations – because it illustrates in a very simple and practical way the inherent tradeoffs in any project.



(Image from [oneresult.co.uk](http://oneresult.co.uk))

This triangle illustrates the fact that the three fundamental elements of a project are interrelated (one side of the triangle cannot be changed without impacting the others) and it is not possible to optimize all three – one will always suffer. In other words, you have three options;

1. Design something quickly and to a high standard, but then it will not be cheap
  2. Design something quickly and cheaply, but it will not be of a high quality
  3. Design something with high quality and cheaply, but it will take a long time to either manufacture or install

It is generally accepted that it is only possible to achieve two of the elements at the same time, so you can have a high quality build and you can get it done quickly but it is going to cost you more. Ask any builder (and always add at least 50% on to the time estimated to complete the work – builders operate very naturally, yet consistently in their own space time continuum).

The triangle also works on the principle that as more emphasis is placed on one element less is placed on the others. These constraints are often competing, as a tight timeline typically means increased cost and reduced quality, a tight budget could mean increased time and reduced quality and increased quality typically means increased time and increased cost.

Pinning down your key objectives in relation to each of these elements is absolutely essential for the planning phase of a project. By having these opportunities, constraints and compromises/tradeoffs in mind during the course of a project it allows for better project decisions and will ensure alignment between the build team and the client.

Having said all the above, I personally think that instead of viewing the time, quality, cost triangle as a straight jacket that constrains a build, the best projects are those where the project manager not only uses one or more of the axes to shift the emphasis of the project, but juggles all three like hot potatoes and makes decisions every single day to manage the trade offs and the precarious balance that must be

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Tall chest by Tortie Hoare and  
Natalie Brady

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maintained to deliver the project successfully... time vs. quality vs. cost.

So, during the course of this weekend, my husband and I will be defining and agreeing the priorities for our build - fingers crossed his priorities are the same as mine...

Jane Price-Stephens runs her own interior design business, to find out more

visit: [www.janepricestephens.com](http://www.janepricestephens.com), <http://janepricestephens.blogspot.com/>, follow Jane on Twitter @jpricestephens or call 07970 547433.

\*Helicopter pilot that my hubby flew with. Name unknown. Now deceased. RIP...

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