



I was driving home when an ad came over the radio asking me to avoid the pitfalls of the low-priced, no-talent, bad tattoo artist — to “Think before you ink.”

Now, I don't have any tattoos. But I do have some friends who have awesome tattoos, as well as some who have not-so-awesome tattoos. What made the difference?

That got me thinking about CharterSills and our recent loss of a coveted lighting design project. The architectural firm that sent out the RFP was not a current client — one with whom we had a strong track record of award-winning projects. The firm only knew us from our excellent reputation. Still, they were not interested in a pre-proposal, face-to-face meeting — only in electronically answering our questions, then receiving our fee proposal.

What happened? We lost the project because our fee was higher than the other lighting design firm's

fee. No other factors mattered — just like choosing a tattoo artist based solely on price.

The trouble is, that low price could be an indicator of so-so lighting talent — lack of imagination and inability to execute. When you, the architect, run the risk of a project being done poorly, or not completed on time, or beyond budget (or all three), shouldn't you “Think before you ink” that low-priced lighting design contract?

Curious, I did a little research and came across this blog post written by Leo Gommon: “7 Ways to Avoid Tattoo Regret.” They are as follows: take your time, do your research, establish contact, think practically, don't price shop, think long term, be smart and safe.

Similarly, when considering a lighting design firm, these are also seven ways an architect can avoid “lighting regret”:

## 1 Take Your Time

Thoughtfully consider whether the lighting design firm provides strong Vision, either creating initial concepts OR running with design ideas already in hand. Don't rush the selection and risk a mediocre collaboration.

## 2 Be Smart and Safe

Inquire into a lighting design firm's Focus, the ability to drill down on the details, from specs to codes to construction drawings.

## 3 Think Long Term

Lighting needs to outlive the buildings life cycle by at

least one minute. Avoid the trendy. Select a designer that will deliver Oversight, contributing expertise through the life span of the project.

## 4 Think Practically

Every architect wants to design a three-legged building. Select a lighting consultant that will be inspired to take on an innovative project, but make sure their design will fit within the constraints of budget and time and most importantly that it's a buildable solution.

## 5 Do Your Research

Ask around, call references to see if the lighting design firm has delivered inspired + buildable projects for other firms. Match your scope and expectations to their project portfolio.

## 6 Establish Contact

Set up a pre-proposal, face-to-face meeting with the lighting designer to kick around ideas and talk about the project. See if there's a connection.

## 7 Don't Price Shop

Select a lighting designer on the criteria above, rather than on price. After you make the selection, if price is an issue, communicate and negotiate to develop a more appropriate project scope.

Following these steps will go a long way toward ensuring you don't have “lighting regret.” In the end, rather than a two-headed dragon on your arm, you'll have a spectacular and successful lighting project to show off.