

## Successes and Failures of Contracting Your Timberframe Home

My name is John Van Bruggen, and I am with Clydesdale Frames Co. I built my timberframe home 10 years ago, and to be honest, I'm still not done. My wife is more than willing to point out that little area over here...or that little area over there...that still needs a piece of trim...a bit of caulking...or whatever. The old adage, that a carpenter's house is never finished, certainly rings true for me. Many of you are here with a huge, an important question. Should you, or shouldn't you, act as the general contractor (GC) for your timberframe home? This is less a question about ability, although that enters in to it, but more a question about motive and personality.

Motive: implies an emotion or desire, operating on the will and causing it to act

Personality: one of the attributes, or features, that make up and distinguish an individual

My motive to build my own home was simple. I always want to know why. If a room has an odd shape to it, for no obvious reason, I want to know why. I want to know why the roof has a particular style. Why a hip roof, when a gable would also have worked. Some of these decisions are hammered out during the design process, I get that, but if I were to buy a home, I'd miss out on the why's. Therefore, I knew I'd have to build. My personality enjoys the journey, more than the destination. I love the strategy and tactics involved in anything. I often tell clients that building a home is the best and worst thing they will ever do. The reason for this is the lists of decisions that need to be made. The journey is long. If you are taking on the responsibility of general contractor as well, this list, this journey, gets longer. This will test your character, your patience, your skills, and your marriage.

Examining your motives and personality is a tough thing to do, but I don't think that you have to hire some psychoanalyst at \$125 an hour for a couple years. I think the best way to accomplish the examination, is through humor.

Here is an example: If you are the kinda guy who struggles with, which end of the hammer to use....you probably shouldn't build your own timberframe home. Or....if you are the kinda guy who can talk for hours about the difference between a worm-drive saw and a circular saw....you probably could build your own timberframe home.

OK...to start, KNOWLEDGE. It's important to understand the relationship between building your own, or contracting your own timber home. The books lead you to believe that contracting your own home, means scheduling sub-contractors from the comfort of your desk, and saving 20% in the process. This is not true. Building your own, means pitching in with portions of the construction and supervising the overall project, which means availability throughout the day to verify dimensions, make decisions, etc. I use the two terms synonymously. If you want to contract your own timberframe home, you must get your hands dirty to see any amount of cost savings. You will need a great understanding of the plan, the order of events, communication skills, and not to mention rubber boots and good gloves.

In other words...

If you are the kinda guy who has been labeled a do-it-your selfer....you probably could build your own timberframe home.

If you are the kinda guy who would rather let someone else handle it....you probably shouldn't build your own timberframe home.

Secondly...SKILLS and ENERGY. All of the successes that I have seen, over the years, have one thing in common, blisters, that's right....blisters. My clients, that have saved a lot of money in building their own home, have all been highly motivated. Motivated to save money....yes, but also motivated in the process itself. Building a timberframe home usually starts with the dream of living in one. Realizing that dream may take many paths, but in the end, pitching in with labor and leadership is the key. The question to ask yourself is, "What kind of skills do I have, or have access to?" Can you frame, pour concrete, hang drywall, roof, cabinets and trim, lay stone, etc., etc.? Do you have a buddy who can excavate the basement and complete all the dirt work and final grading? Now these are "ability" skills, but they tie back in to your motive and personality. Usually, we are driven to accomplish goals, in areas, where we already have ability. I'm not driven to write music, or play music, because I have zero ability to do so. If you feel driven to build your own timberframe home, then you have ability their somewhere....what is it?

If you are the kinda guy who never has enough time....you probably shouldn't build your own timberframe home.

If you are the kinda guy who always finds time for numerous honey do's, fishing trips, car auctions....you probably could build your own timberframe home.

Thirdly...TIME. Availability, on a daily basis, is your #1 responsibility. You must be available, or present, to successfully build and manage the project. Understanding the plan is mandatory. There is nothing hard about contracting the construction of a timberframe, but there are things that are different. Your sub-contractors will be used to doing things a certain way, sometimes that needs to be adjusted. You will need to understand when and where that will be necessary. Understanding comes with experience, but it also comes with focus, pure motives, and good character. You are the boss. The sub-contractors know this, however, you will be more effective in managing the team, if they get to know you personally. They will learn to anticipate your standards for acceptable building practices, only if you have the time to be on the job every day. This doesn't mean you need to put in 12 hours every day, but it does mean your presence is expected at any time.

If you are the kinda guy whose directives need a bit of clairvoyance to understand....you probably shouldn't build your own timberframe home.

If you are the kinda guy who always seems to get your point across....you probably could build your own timberframe home.

Fourthly...COMMUNICATION. Communication is big, it's huge. All the trades have their own language and expectations. Carpenters know how to talk to carpenters. Electricians, masons, plumbers and even the plan reviewers down at the building permit place, all have their own language. You will have to talk to them all, and then be able to pass on the information, coherently, to the next trade. You must have a verbal working relationship with your sub-contractors. If they don't understand something, or if you don't understand something, you will need to work it out. A healthy, professional, working relationship will be the result of good communication. No question is a dumb question. No amount of explanation is too much. All of the parties involved must be on the same page, and it is your responsibility, through good communication, to get them there.

If you are the kinda guy who has a knack for understanding spatial relationships...you probably could build your own timberframe home.

If you are the kinda guy who has no idea what I just said...you probably shouldn't build your own timberframe home.

Finally...CLARITY of PURPOSE. You can't ad lib a timberframe house structurally. That's why there are plans. The plan, is the law, by which the home is built. Once there is a working drawing in your hands, major deviations from it will result in a poorly constructed home. Always remember, the timberframe is pre-built elsewhere, according to the working plan. The SIP's are pre-built elsewhere, according to the working plan. These two components are relying on your ability to ensure the foundation and sub-floor, are the correct size. All of our tape measures are made in China, they all read the same way. If one of your potential sub-contractors uses a metric tape measure... do not hire him. To get to the working plan, you will go through many revisions. This process should familiarize yourself with all of the inner workings of that plan. A common mistake is to only focus on the floor plans, and not thoroughly review the foundation and section drawings. If the foundation is wrong, you have a mess. I have raised frames on foundations that were too narrow in width, in length, and on foundations that were too big in width, and also in length. I have seen concrete piers that were nowhere near, where they were supposed to be. These situations all happened because there wasn't an intimate understanding of the plan by the general contractor. Thus, that confusion, or lack of oversight filtered down into the trades.

If you are the kinda guy who lives by "Trust, but verify"...then you probably could build your own timberframe home.

If you are the kinda guy who says, "Ahhh...they'll figure it out."...then you probably shouldn't build your own timberframe home.

Hey...people make mistakes, always have, always will. I've never seen a mistake that couldn't have been prevented. After 70 some timberframes, I'm still looking for that perfect cut and raising. We've been close, very close, but there has always been one little thing that kept me from declaring "perfect". I don't know if a mistake free, perfect home has ever been built. Preventing mistakes through management, is really about common

sense and allotted time. If you are constantly rushing around, your preparedness for the next step will suffer, and mistakes will be made. Allow yourself enough time to look at the forest, and forget the trees. This will enable you to focus on the numerous tasks at hand, and upcoming decisions. Use your common sense verifying the work done by your sub-contractors. Verify the length and width and height of the foundation before the concrete is poured. Verify you are within the boundaries of your setbacks before excavation. Verify when you need to call for an inspection, before starting the next phase of work. Verify with the local building department, the information needed, to pull a permit. Verify with the power company, the information needed, to get temporary power to the job site. Verify all the dimensions and templates, with the cabinet shop, before they build. These things and many others will keep the ant-acid in the cabinet, and not in your pocket.

### The Four Major Components

There are four major components to a timberframe. They must work in concert with each other.

- 1) the Timberframe
- 2) the SIP's (structural insulated panels)
- 3) the sub-floor
- 4) the foundation

We will discuss these components in class, and explain how they affect each other. There are drawings included to help visualize all the components.

The following page contains a 15 question quiz, designed to provide a sampling of what a GC (general contractor) must know. I encourage you to take the quiz, have fun, and analyze your motives and personality. The answers to the quiz appear on our web-site [www.clydesdaleframes.com](http://www.clydesdaleframes.com)

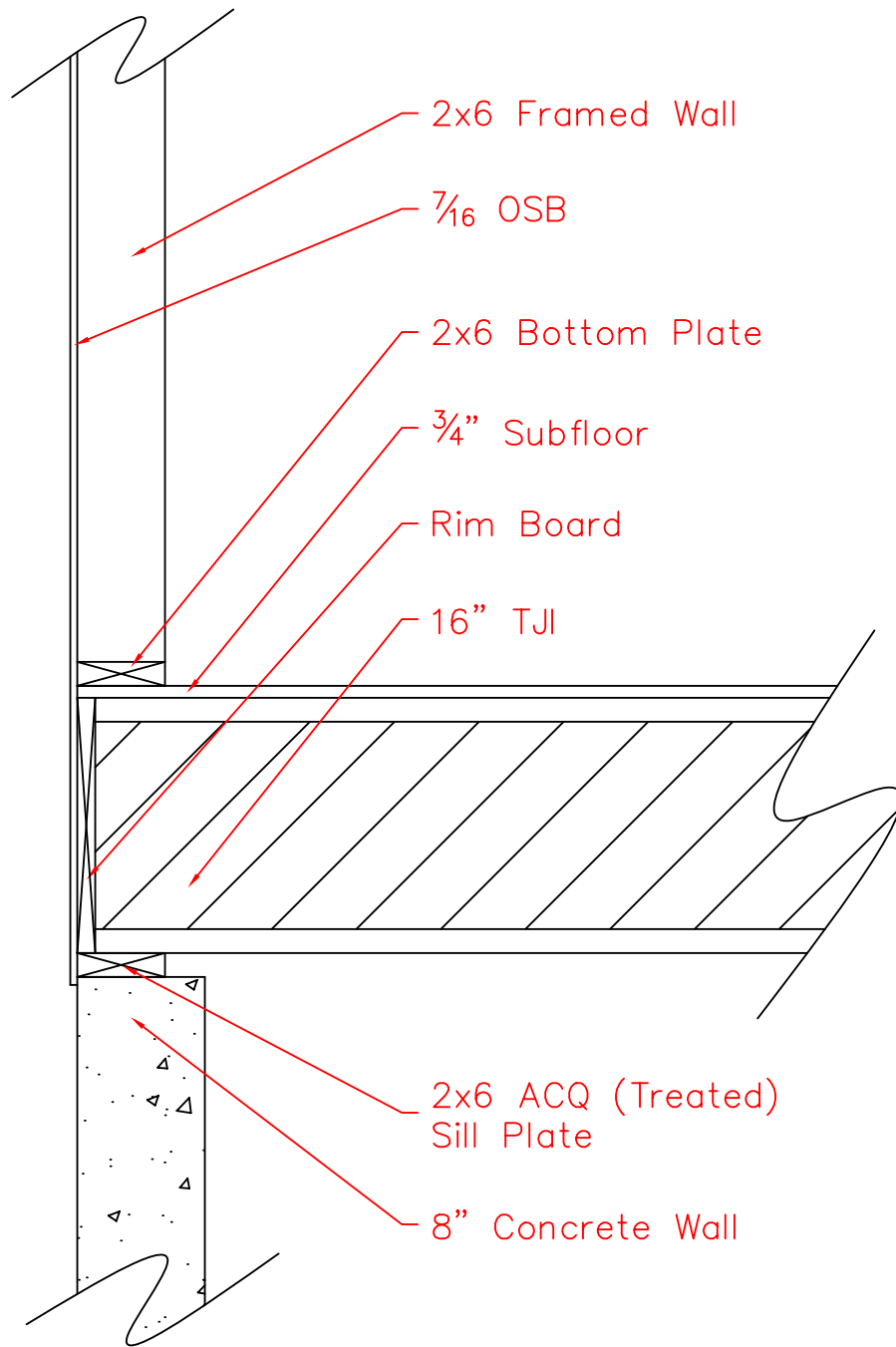
John Van Bruggen  
Clydesdale Frames Co.  
610 North Clydesdale  
67501  
620-663-6200  
Fax) 620-663-6201  
[john@clydesdaleframes.com](mailto:john@clydesdaleframes.com)  
[www.clydesdaleframes.com](http://www.clydesdaleframes.com)

# GCED

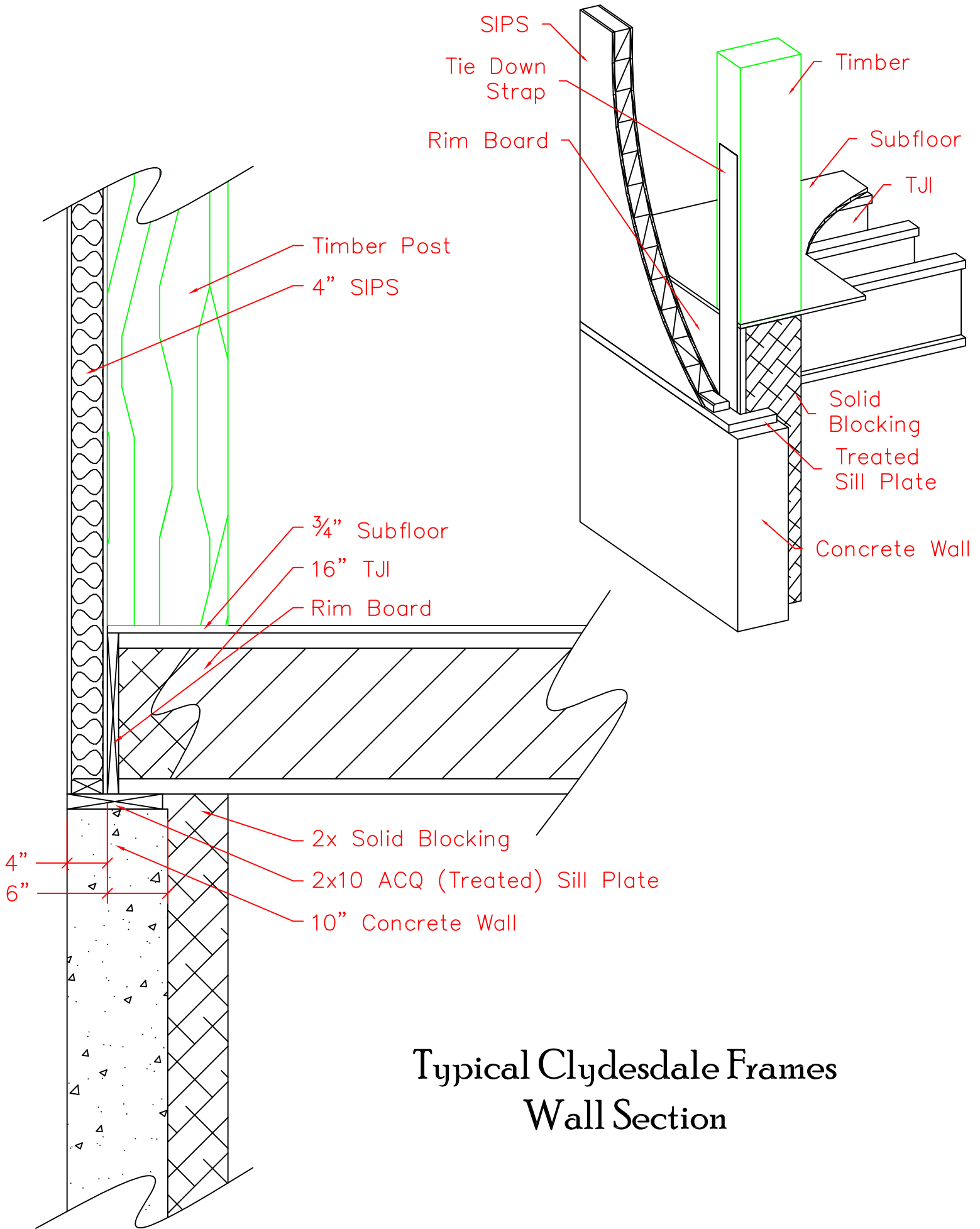
(General Contracting Educational Degree)

- 1) Do you know what information, is required, to receive a building permit in your area? **Answer...**
- 2) What are three, of the numerous, factors considered, when effectively laying out a jobsite? **Answer...**
- 3) Can you read a plan? Can you define the terms; floor plan, elevation, section, roof drawing, schedule, foundation drawing, etc. and can you rectify dimensions, or information, from one, to another? **Answer...**
- 4) Can you define the term “grade”? Specifically, how it relates to elevations, commonly referred to as “100 grade” (or 100'-0”). **Answer...**
- 5) Can you name, or draw, four, of the numerous roof styles? Additionally, can you identify the slope of a roof, using a mathematical term commonly used by carpenters? **Answer...**
- 6) Can you define the terms; footing, foundation wall, pier, post pad, brick ledge, pilaster, #4 rebar, #6 rebar. **Answer...**
- 7) Do you know how to “square” a foundation wall? Do you square before, or after, it is poured with concrete? **Answer...**
- 8) Do you know how to “square” the sub-floor? Do you square before, or after, the plywood is applied? **Answer...**
- 9) Do you know what a “rough opening” (RO) is? **Answer...**
- 10) Can you name two factors which affect RO's? **Answer...**
- 11) Can you define the term “egress”? Specifically, how it relates to rooms within a single family residence. **Answer...**
- 12) Do you know the difference between a post, and a beam? **Answer...**
- 13) Can you define the terms; dead load, live load, point load, uniform load? **Answer...**
- 14) Can you define the term; SIP? **Answer...**
- 15) Do you know the difference between a hot roof, and a cold roof? **Answer...**

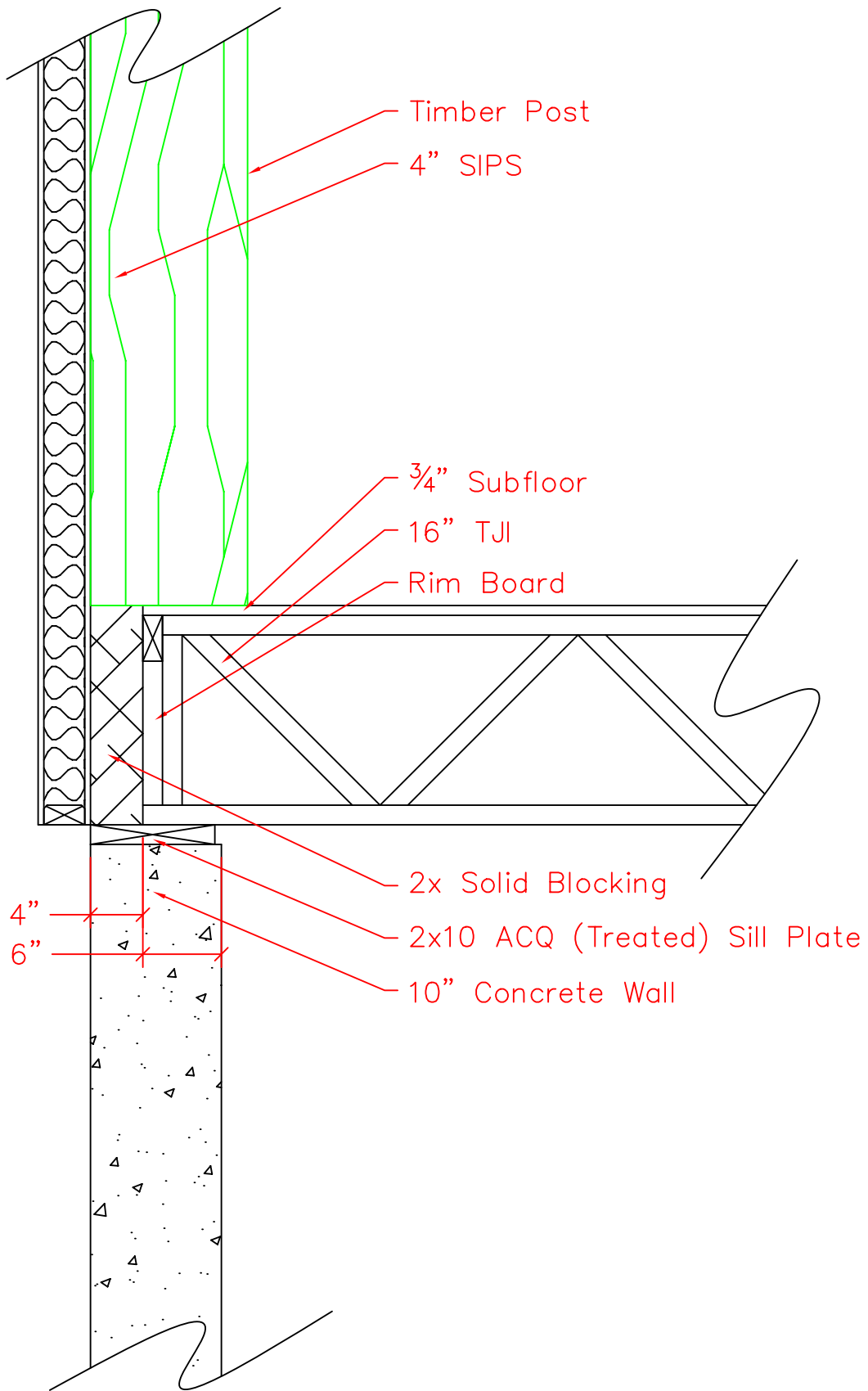
Congratulations...upon successful completion of this quiz, you are one step closer to receiving a GCED. Answers are on our web-site [www.clydesdaleframes.com](http://www.clydesdaleframes.com)



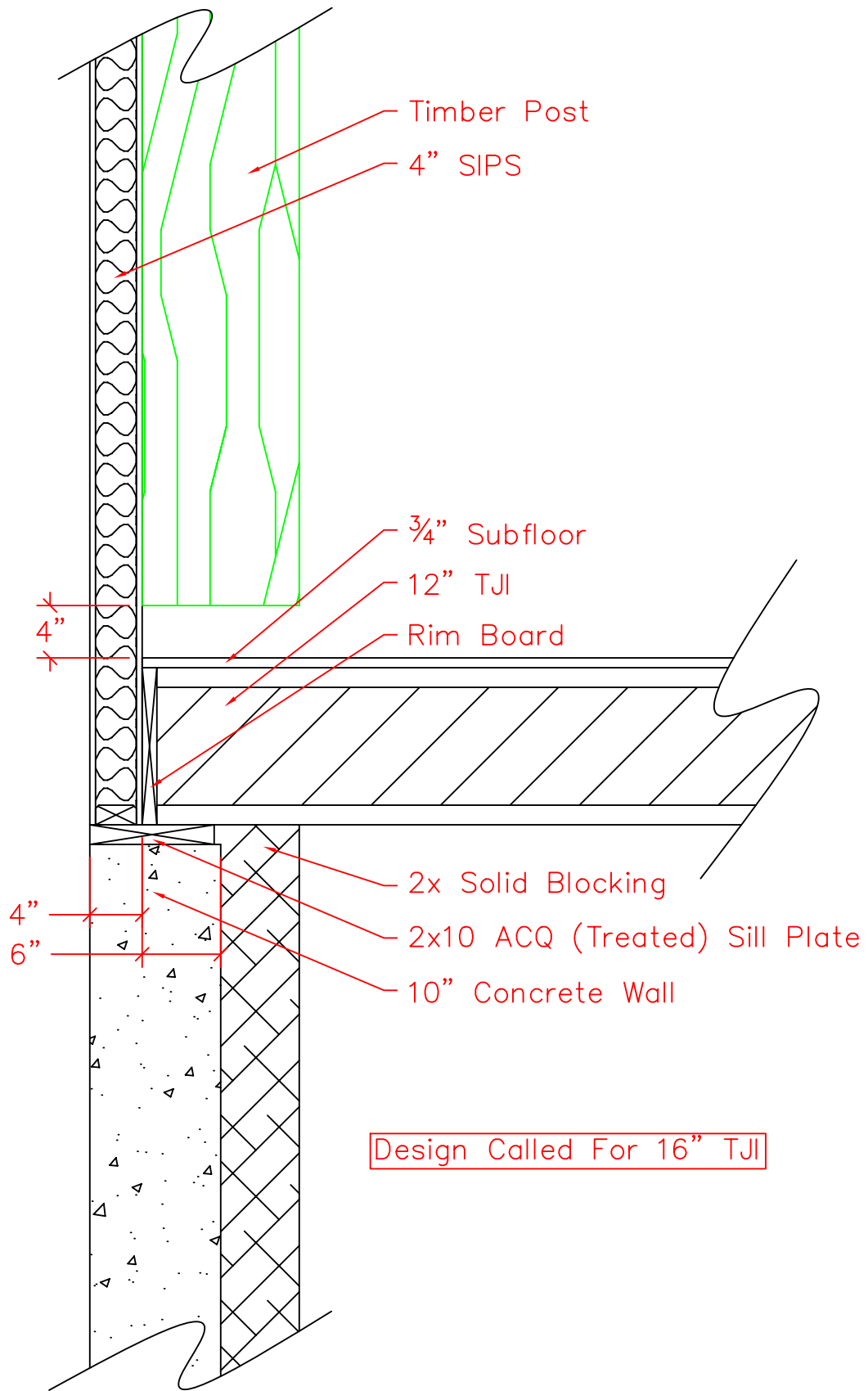
Typical Stick Framed  
Wall Section



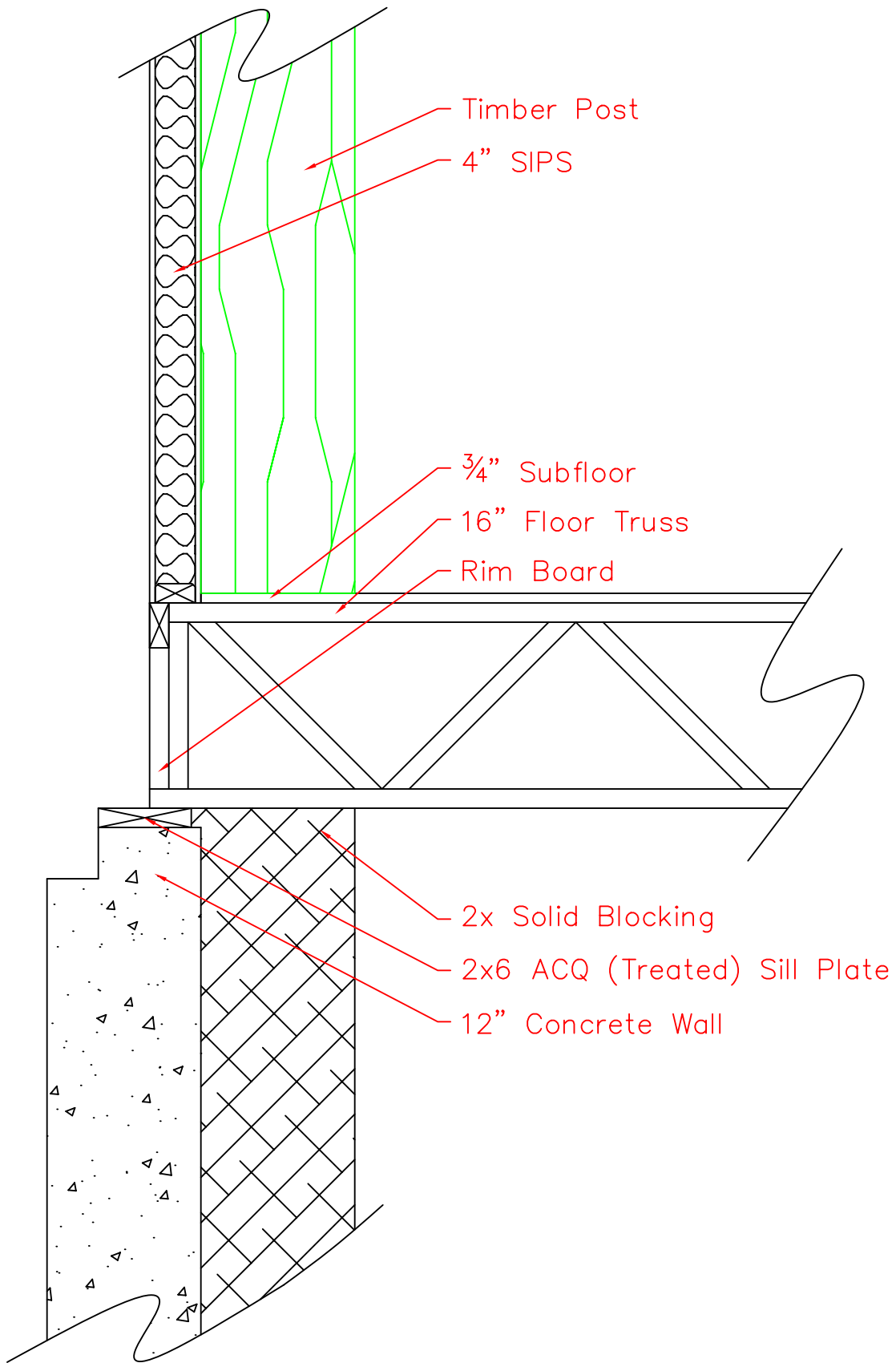
Typical Clydesdale Frames  
 Wall Section



Foundation Too Small



TJI Depth Too Short



Foundation Too Large