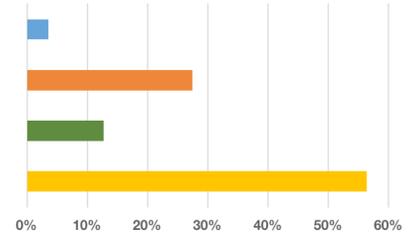


TRENDLINES

Firms' projected EBITDA



The majority (56 percent) of respondents to Zweig Group's 2016 Valuation Survey projected that their earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation, and amortization would **grow** in the coming year. Another 13 percent projected a **decline**, 27 percent projected that their EBITDA would **remain flat**, and the remaining 4 percent **didn't specify an answer**.

— Vivian Cummings, research analyst assistant

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Long-term relationships

You may have long-term “relationships” because of your company’s reputation with people you don’t even know.

“Everything you and your people do either enhances that image or detracts from it. You cannot underestimate the importance of having others think positively about you.”



Mark Zweig

EDITORIAL

I’ve always been a long-term relationship kind of guy. I still have friends that I went to grade school with. I try to be loyal to long-term vendors and sub-consultants and service providers. And I have had some of the same clients for nearly 28 years.

Sometimes you (or your organization) may have long-term relationships that you aren’t aware of and these can either positively or negatively impact your image and reputation. I had one of those cases recently where things worked out well. My other business, Mark Zweig, Inc., is a design-build-development company that does primarily residential but also does some commercial projects.

We recently sold a completely redone and expanded 1919 house in downtown Fayetteville to a couple whose primary residence is in Little Rock but who have had a second home here for several years. They both went to school here at the University of Arkansas back in the day, and they also have children and grandchildren living in the area as well.

So a month or so after these folks moved in, word came to me through my head of operations that the couple really wanted to meet me in person as well as show me the house after they had moved all their stuff in. So we set it up for a Friday afternoon several weeks down the road when they would next be in town.

See MARK ZWEIG, page 2

MORE COLUMNS

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\$100K awarded to three schools

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High-riser in Houston

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BUSINESS NEWS

CONCORD ENGINEERING WINS OWNER'S ENGINEER CONTRACT FOR PSEG KEYS ENERGY CENTER Concord Engineering was recently selected by PSEG as their Owner's Engineer for a 755 MW power plant through a competitive bidding process between multiple firms based on its experienced combined-cycle engineering staff and the company's success with previous PSEG projects. Concord will be onsite throughout both the project's construction and start-up phases.

The PSEG Keys Energy Center, located in Maryland, will add needed capacity and energy to the state of Maryland and the surrounding region and will be completed in May of 2018. The \$825 - \$875 million investment will supply PJM through the Potomac Electric Power Company's 500 kV transmission system with enough clean, reliable energy to power 500,000 homes.

PSEG will oversee construction, operate and maintain the plant that features two gas-fired turbines and one steam turbine. The energy center will use state-of-the-art generating technology, including a full complement of emissions controls and run on clean, efficient natural gas.

Said Kevin Best, Concord's PM, "We are thrilled to support PSEG Power in their engineering needs as they continue their commitment to clean energy and regional economic growth."

SANDERSON FARMS RELIES ON TINDALL FOR NEW POULTRY PROCESSING PLANT Tindall Corporation, a national leader in precast concrete, recently completed the precast concrete structures for Sanderson Farms, Inc.'s new poultry processing plant in Palestine, Texas and has been selected to deliver precast for Sanderson's

new facility in St. Pauls, North Carolina. Sanderson's processing operations include feed mills, hatcheries, administrative offices and waste water treatment facilities.

Tindall's single-source precast concrete project approach includes complete engineering and design coordination with other critical building systems, fabrication of all precast components at one of Tindall's fully enclosed fabrication facilities and just-in-time delivery and installation of the precast building components on-site.

Complex food processing facilities, such as Sanderson Farms, benefit from the high-quality and multi-purpose factory-fabricated components and accelerated construction completion that precast concrete is able to provide. The high-performance, insulated architectural wall panels provide the exterior visual features of the facility and the insulated and energy-efficient thermal building envelope for the varied interior room environments, ranging from refrigerated to ambient. The interior smooth surfaces are necessary in certain processing areas where clean design features support food safety and hygiene that are critical to the overall facility operations and good manufacturing practices.

Sanderson's Palestine, Texas facility includes more than 170,000 square feet of space constructed with precast concrete column, beam, and roof members that include sanitary design features. Rapid delivery and installation of the precast concrete structure provided other construction trades earlier access and installation schedules and provided Sanderson earlier beneficial occupancy of the facility.

MARK ZWEIG, from page 1

I knew the buyer's name – Jim McClelland. He is the founder of a prominent local civil engineering and surveying company that bears his name today. When the time arrived for me to stop by the house to meet him and his wife, I was surprised to learn he had been an early and loyal reader of *The Zweig Letter* for many years – from way back when we first started writing it in the late '80s/early '90s. He and his wife were ecstatic about their new house – they really appreciated all the details and quality we tried to put into it. That he felt he knew me from reading my writings all those years really made it even better.

Sometimes, in business, you have long-term "relationships" with people you don't even know. They may not know your name or face, yet have an affinity for your company because of your reputation or interactions they have had with your firm. Everything you and your people do either enhances that image or detracts from it. You cannot underestimate the importance of having others think positively about you. Anything other than that is going to cause problems for you at some point down the road. Every single relationship has to be nurtured. Every problem with quality or client service or client satisfaction has to be confronted. Anything other than that and you run the risk of bad things being said about you or losing a project you may not even know about.

You never know how what you do and how you treat people will come back to you. It may be a strange and circuitous path but it probably will in some way. ▀

MARK ZWEIG is Zweig Group's founder and CEO. Contact him at mzweig@zweiggroup.com.

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PROFILE



Team members with Hargrove Engineers + Constructors at a carbon dioxide capture and storage plant.

A culture of success

Powered by founding principles, an Alabama engineering firm has emerged as a national player in petroleum, life sciences, and paper products.

By RICHARD MASSEY
Managing Editor

Company culture can do wonders for an A/E/P firm. It can outlast a downturn, ensure a recovery, trigger a boom in business development, and attract the best and brightest. Indeed, company culture is a multifaceted thing.

One of the great advocates of company culture, and a beneficiary of its many virtues, is Ralph A. Hargrove, founder, president, and CEO of **Hargrove Engineers + Constructors** (Mobile, AL), now the largest engineering firm in Alabama, and, according to *Engineering News Record*, the 90th largest in the United States.

“We care about each other and have compassion. When we compete [for contracts], we compete for each other’s families.”

In the last five years, Hargrove has made its push, graduating from a regional firm on the Gulf Coast to a national firm with 11 offices in six states and a workforce of more than 1,200 people. While the re-

cent growth trajectory has garnered the headlines, Hargrove says the die was cast back in 1995, when the company and its culture – based on total commitment to the client – were founded.

“If you keep supporting your clients, they’ll force your hand and ask you to do more,” Hargrove says.

The company culture also has an enduring internal piece – commitment to the team. An employee-owned firm, part of the mission is to put food on the table for its people and the communities in which it works.

“We care about each other and have compassion,” Hargrove says. “When we compete [for contracts], we compete for each other’s families.”

For good reason, the focus on company culture revolves around the titans of today’s economy – Google, Twitter, Facebook, Southwest Airlines, and Progressive Insurance. Magazines like *Forbes*, *Entrepreneur*, *Business Insider*, and *Inc.* have all written about it, too. But Hargrove has its own brand, perhaps a bit more old fashioned, and over the last 20 years, it’s only strengthened.

See HARGROVE, page 4



BUSINESS NEWS

BALFOUR BEATTY COMMUNITIES TAKES HOME TOP HONORS AT 2015 PHMA AWARDS

Balfour Beatty Communities, a leading provider of property management, development, and related real estate services, announced that it was honored with six Professional Housing Management Association Awards for 2015. The annual awards program recognizes the outstanding achievements of those who support the housing needs of military members of the Armed Services.

Balfour Beatty Communities was recognized with both team and individual awards in the Military Service category for 2015, including:

- **Outstanding Housing Team** – Privatized Location, Air Force: Luke Air Force Base
- **Outstanding Housing Team** – Privatized Location, Army: United States Military Academy - West Point
- **Outstanding Housing Team** – Privatized Location, Navy: NAS Jacksonville
- **Deke Giles Award** – Terri Edelman, EVP Balfour Beatty Communities
- **Outstanding Mid-level Manager** – Gary Frederickson, NAS Meridian
- **Outstanding Housing/Billeting Employee** – Jessica Ennis, NS Mayport

Balfour Beatty Communities President, Chris Williams, said, "It is one thing to talk about the importance of creating partnerships with our military clients and providing quality housing. Our employees live by these words and I am continually impressed with their diligence in working together to create and maintain the best possible living environments for our military members and their families. To see our teams, both at an installation and individual level, be recognized by the industry is deeply rewarding and we congratulate all individuals recognized on this esteemed industry honor."

HARGROVE, from page 3

Proof is in the width and depth of what the firm can do. Hargrove provides technical support, engineering, and project management services in industries including pulp, paper and consumer products, chemicals, petroleum refining, power generation, life sciences, and heavy manufacturing.

"We never quit business development, recruiting, and training. We are constantly doing those things."

The firm started off doing the dirty work at plants that other firms weren't doing – and in many instances, that's still the case. But right now, Hargrove is also working on a \$200-million substation revamp at a major Gulf Coast refinery, and several \$50- to \$100-million chemical plant upgrades, among other projects.

To keep its edge, Hargrove is constantly looking for, and hiring, new talent across an array of platforms.

"If they're good, we'll find a way to get them on the bus," Hargrove says.

The firm is at the point in its development that most of the recruiting is done through referrals from clients, or, in some cases, the clients themselves are hired. New hires, if they make the cut, have to fulfill the company's culture of relentless, and timely, dedication to project success.

"We're not a sweatshop, but we move quickly," Hargrove says.

Due to its diversity of staff and services, Hargrove, while a large firm, is still nimble and responsive. And for a company whose sweet spot is industrial revamps, much of it in the slumping oil and gas industry, these are tricky times.

According to the *Houston Business Journal*, Southwestern Energy Co., based in Houston, slashed more than 1,000 jobs. And according to the *Journal*, two Houston oil companies, Paragon Offshore PLLC, and Goodrich Petroleum, have recently been delisted from the New York Stock Exchange. Oil field services giant Schlumberger Ltd., a

bellwether for the industry, also cut 10,000 jobs in the fourth quarter of 2015, reported *Bloomberg Business*.

Hargrove, of course, is no stranger to uncertain times. During the Great Recession, the firm rallied with the implementation of an across-the-board cut in compensation and benefits. The result, Hargrove says, is that the firm, particularly the veterans, stayed together. No mass layoffs. No mass hire when times improved.

What was lost in the recession has been replaced, and in many cases, surpassed. One thing that never changed and never went away, however, was the culture of commitment.

"We never quit business development, recruiting, and training," Hargrove says. "We are constantly doing those things."

The firm started out in Hargrove's attic with about 10 other people. By 2012, the firm landed at No. 175 on Engineering News Record's list. In 2013, the firm appeared at No. 135. The ranking improved to 115 in 2014, and then the breakthrough, cracking the top 100 in 2015.

"Unquestionably, Hargrove's expansion has resulted from our team being comprised of the best talent with expansive capabilities. We are always ready to compete and looking over the horizon to see what's coming next."

In an interview last year with *Business Alabama* magazine, Hargrove, 58, talked about his firm's rise to the top spot in his home state. In 2014, the firm checked in with \$133 million in design fees, and by the middle of 2015, was on pace to shatter the previous year. From the comments he made to *Business Alabama*, Hargrove looks to have another such year in 2016.

"Unquestionably, Hargrove's expansion has resulted from our team being comprised of the best talent with expansive capabilities," he told the magazine. "We are always ready to compete and looking over the horizon to see what's coming next." ■

To lead: Plan for the long-term

Annual resolutions are short-term planning at best. Your business strategies need to be more decisive and focused.



Stephen
Lucy

BEST PRACTICES

Now that another new year is in full throttle, are you checking off your list of resolutions, or are you envisioning your firm's future? Annual resolutions are short-term planning at best. For the long-term, your business strategies must be more decisive and focused. Here are a few suggestions to help stir up your thinking.

1) Push the envelope. This business phrase speaks to the importance of doing more than the status quo. Steve Jobs was the epitome of thinking outside the mainstream. He had the unique ability to discern what his customers craved, and he brought passion to the process of inventing new ways to utilize technology. His drive for excellence and merging beauty into the engineering process forever changed the technology landscape.

“It's easy to become complacent and set in our ways. However, as repetitive behavior breeds repetitive results, you need to ask yourself if you are satisfied with the status quo.”

It's easy to become complacent. However, as repetitive behavior breeds repetitive results, you need to ask yourself if you are satisfied with the status quo. Also, think about when you were most invigorated by your work. It was probably when you were expanding into a new market, implementing new technology or advancing staff to new duties. I have yet to talk to a successful leader who was not working to change or improve their business. When was the last time you did something different and challenging? If you cannot remember, then it is definitely time for a change.

2) Take risks. Be bold. Dare to fail. Create opportunity. These are business strategies that often ignite change. If you are a leader who wants to grow both professionally and as a firm, taking business risks is a necessary part of the path to growth. But what risks should you take?

As an engineer I was trained to be risk averse, but as a business leader I embrace calculated risk as I know that it can lead to advancement within our firm. This also means that I accept that there will be failures, but history tells me that all great innovations were preceded by failures. I am not advocating that you risk the existence of your firm. However, without some acceptance of risk and willingness to venture into the unknown you will not be able to implement change. In planning for the long-term, the decisions

you make to move forward will either hold you back or free you to grow beyond your greatest expectations.

3) Act for the future. In addition to thinking about your firm's future, you must also set aside time to think about yours, both personal and professional. A basic part of a leader's vision is determining an exit strategy. Most of us postpone this discussion as we don't want to think about the end of our careers, but this is a fundamental piece of any strategic planning. Aligning your interests with your firm's capacity to support those interests is important as your decisions also impact those around you.

You also need to know the future desires of others in your firm as they should be mutually supportive. While you want to act toward the future, it cannot be an individual act. It must be a group or corporate act if you want the transition in leadership and vision to be smooth and sustainable.

4) Climb out of the weeds. How many times do you look back at the end of the day and try to determine if you accomplished anything of importance? We become bogged down by the minutiae of our work instead of focusing on our firm's vision. We are like a snake crawling through the grass, sticking our head up now and then, until a lawnmower finally cuts it off.

“If you are a leader who wants to grow both professionally and as a firm, taking business risks is a necessary part of the path to growth.”

While taking care of the day-to-day is important, aren't you supposed to be the strategic thinker for your firm? Is the task you are doing the best and highest use of your time, or should it be handled by someone else? I continually hear the excuse: “My clients expect me.” That's not really true. Your clients expect a service and a certain quality of performance. And what better way to enhance that service than focusing on what is strategically relevant for

See STEPHEN LUCY, page 8



SPOTLIGHT ON: Experience

PROFILE



\$100K awarded to three schools

The University of Florida, Mississippi State University, and Philadelphia University have been awarded by the NCARB to promote real-world experience in architecture.

By LIISA ANDREASSEN
Correspondent



Lisa Huang,
Assistant
Professor,
University of
Florida

The National Council of Architectural Registration Boards, a licensing and support agency for the industry, selected three college programs for their curricula blending academic and real-world experience, and has dedicated a total of \$100,000 in awards.

“In professional practice, the opportunity to experiment with materials and assemblies can be limited by budget, project schedules, and life-safety issues. The academic setting is the ideal environment to experiment and learn from failures.”

The recipients are the University of Florida, Mississippi State University, and Philadelphia University. The NCARB awards are intended to address

specific areas where the academy can bridge the gap between education and practice and better prepare students for internships and future careers as architects.

FLORIDA. The University of Florida’s School of Architecture was given \$35,000 for the development of a laboratory that will enable students to work with practitioners and manufacturers to learn how materials influence the structural soundness and safety of their designs. This graduate-level studio project is scheduled for fall 2016.

The co-project directors are Lisa Huang, assistant professor, and Bradley Walters, associate professor, and the non-faculty architect practitioner is Albert Alfonso, founding principal of **Alfonso Architects** (Tampa, FL).

“In professional practice, the opportunity to experiment with materials and assemblies can be limited by budget, project schedules, and life-safety issues,” Huang says. “The academic setting is the ideal environment to experiment and learn from failures.”



erience:

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“The project will allow students to learn directly from practitioners who fabricate their own design mock-ups and constructions and to expand their research beyond the limits of conventional practice.”

Through full-scale mock-ups, students will gain knowledge of project risks associated with new and innovative products, materials, and technologies. The students will be challenged to tackle the physical and intellectual resistances of working directly with full-scale building materials. The goal is to develop a “seeing hand” that understands the relationship between architectural constraints and material realities.

“We start with detail in order to explore issues of tactility, phenomenological effects, and the poetics of material assemblies,” Huang says. “The project will allow students to learn directly from practitioners who fabricate their own design mock-ups and constructions, and to expand their research beyond the limits of conventional practice.”

MISSISSIPPI. Mississippi State University’s College of Architecture, Art, and Design was awarded \$30,048 for its proposal, “Expanding the Agency of Architects.” The program exposes students to different practice management techniques through the school’s partnership with the university’s Carl Small Town Center, which promotes design and planning statewide. The students will study sustainability and social impact design, and apply what they learn to a project in the Mississippi Delta, among the poorest regions in the U.S.

“Architects are good at a lot of things, so we want to expand students’ view about what they can do with their architecture degree. We want them to realize they have the ability to recognize social issues a community may have and use design to solve the problem.”

This hybrid experience is expected to improve students’ communication skills, increase their knowledge of triple bottom line – social, environmental, and financial – and introduce them to practice management methodologies to better articulate their own professional goals.

Project team members include assistant professors Emily M. McGlohn and John Poros, and Emily Roush-Elliott, an Enterprise Rose Architectural Fellow.

See SCHOOLS AWARDED, page 8



University of Florida’s School of Architecture



Philadelphia University’s College of Architecture and the Built Environment



Mississippi State’s College of Architecture, Art, and Design

STEPHEN LUCY, from page 5

the success of your firm. Empower and support your staff in the fulfillment of their duties and you can create your firm's future path.

“Set your sights on creating opportunities for others, and their success becomes team successes.”

5) How do you want to be remembered? Finally, there's the big legacy question: How will I be remembered? Personally, I want to be remembered for what our team accomplished because that's a reflection of me. To be successful, I have to be the facilitator of our vision. Set your sights on creating opportunities for others, and their success becomes the team's success. You don't need to hover and take credit for everything that happens at your firm. Take credit for being a jobs creator, an industry advocate, a leader whose vision is for the long-term success and viability of others.

There are multiple examples of individuals and firms that have done just that. Walter P. Moore Jr. took the firm started by his father and created an entrepreneurial environment built around technical excellence and highlighted by generational leadership change. Freese & Nichols Inc. won the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award – one of only seven U.S. firms to be recognized the year they received it – for continued innovation and improvement, despite being in existence for more than 100 years. And Charles Thornton has

lead the creation and expansion of ACE Mentoring in recognition of our industry's need to attract future generations into the workforce.

There are many different ways to build a legacy. How will you build yours for the long-term?

TAKE THE LONG-TERM VIEW. In the study “Why Good Strategies Fail: Lessons for the C-Suite,” sponsored by *The Economist* and the Project Management Institute, 61 percent of respondents said their firms struggle to bridge the gap between strategy formulation and day-to-day implementation. Only a fraction of those who responded to PMI's study said that their business model was extremely well-aligned with their long-term strategies.

“Take credit for being a jobs creator, an industry advocate, a leader whose vision is for the long-term success and viability of others.”

I'm guessing that everyone just gets too busy when business is good, and too mired in the status quo when business slows. Isn't it time to usher out the old and welcome in the new way of thinking about your long-term resolutions? ▀

Stephen Lucy is CEO of JQ with offices in Austin, Dallas, Fort Worth, Houston, and Lubbock, Texas. Contact him at slucy@jqeng.com.

SCHOOLS AWARDED, from page 7

“Many students have a narrow view of what an architect is – they expect to graduate, go to a city, find a job in a firm, and design houses or office buildings or hospitals,” McGlohn says. “Architects are good at a lot of things, so we want to expand students' view about what they can do with their architecture degree. We want them to realize they have the ability to recognize social issues a community may have and use design to solve the problem.”

PHILADELPHIA. Philadelphia University's College of Architecture and the Built Environment will receive \$34,208 for its proposal to explore the application of textile composites in building envelopes. The project involves the study of emerging technologies and new materials in an interdisciplinary and experimental architecture design studio.

“This project challenges architecture, industrial, and textile design students to push innovation at the intersection of their disciplines, while facilitating meaningful interaction with architectural professionals.”

Students in architecture, engineering, and textiles will study emerging technologies, new materials, and environmental issues, and demonstrate how architects can drive the creation of innovative materials, systems, and technologies.

The project begins next semester as a pilot course open to fourth- and fifth-year architecture students, and juniors, seniors, and graduate students in industrial and textile design.

“The practitioners will have access to the expertise and intellect of Philadelphia University students and faculty to address emerging materials strategies and their implementation in practice.”

“The course then will be assessed, with the expectation that it will become an ongoing elective option, and possibly expanded to include other disciplines,” says Kihong Ku, associate professor of architecture.

This interdisciplinary design and experimental architecture studio approach builds on the university's strength as a center of excellence in architectural innovation, textile, design, and engineering.

“This project challenges architecture, industrial, and textile design students to push innovation at the intersection of their disciplines, while facilitating meaningful interaction with architectural professionals,” Ku says. “Simultaneously, the practitioners will have access to the expertise and intellect of Philadelphia University students and faculty to address emerging materials strategies and their implementation in practice.” ▀

PROFILE

High-riser in Houston

Reputation in one business segment triggers opportunities in another as a Houston design firm adds condo towers to its portfolio of tilt wall offices.

By RICHARD MASSEY
Managing Editor



Jeffrey Brown,
Co-founder,
Powers Brown
Architecture

Developing a new business segment for an established architecture firm is certainly not impossible, but if it's going to happen, and happen in the right way, a few key things like staffing, liability, and workflow, have to be evaluated.

That's the word from Jeffrey Brown, a co-founder and principal at **Powers Brown Architecture** (Houston, TX), an 85-person firm founded in 1999.

The firm, well known and highly regarded in the fields of Class A office and industrial design, interiors, and renovations, about a year ago embraced an entirely new architectural endeavor – luxury high-rise condominiums.

Outside of Brown himself, the firm had little experience with the form, so an intense round of assessments began before the decision was made to add high-rise design to its suite of services.

"What was our liability?" Brown says. "We had to sit down with our insurance company first."

Powers Brown is now in various stages of development on four high-rise projects: The Marlowe in downtown, Arábella in posh River Oaks, Ivy Lofts in the emergent EaDo neighborhood, all in Houston, and an unnamed condo-hotel on the River Walk in San Antonio.

As they hashed out the liability issues, the firm also had to consider changes in drawing standards. Experts in the process of designing horizontal suburban buildings, the firm suddenly had to learn how to go vertical.

"We hadn't done anything high-rise," Brown says.

Finally, the firm had to take a hard look at its team, and decided to add a few essential people – those who had already worked in the high-rise market and who knew the ins and outs of 34-story buildings with amenities such as rooftop terraces and pools.

See POWERS BROWN, page 10



Arábella, by Powers Brown Architecture





WHAT KIND OF INCENTIVE COMPENSATION PLAN SHOULD YOU PROVIDE?

Incentive compensation is an important aspect of attracting and keeping the right candidates for employment. What are peer companies doing? What specialties are seeing success with incentive plans? What incentives should your firm implement and how?

The 2016 *Incentive Compensation Survey* provides important data that firms can use to:

- Improve the programs you already have in place
- Start up new plans from scratch
- Decide who should receive which types of bonuses, how often, and at what amounts
- Find out how firm leaders rate different plans
- Discover which bonus types have been the most successful for motivating, recruiting, and retaining staff

The 2016 *Incentive Compensation Survey* is the all-inclusive report to help you make informed decisions related to incentive compensation plans. Broken down by 11 types of incentive compensation plans, this report will help your firm understand what kind of financial investment it should make to be competitive in today's hiring market. You won't find this kind of data anywhere else!

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- **Company Car Survey** – open until March 2

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POWERS BROWN, from page 9

The assessments proved invaluable, and as a result, Powers Brown is now in various stages of development on four high-rise projects: The Marlowe in downtown, Arábella in posh River Oaks, Ivy Lofts in the emergent EaDo neighborhood, all in Houston, and an unnamed condo-hotel on the River Walk in San Antonio.

The business model for Powers Brown is entrepreneurial. The firm recently branched out from Houston into Denver and the District of Columbia. An Atlanta office is in the works. The firm's goal is to have as many as 10 locations in the United States within a decade. Part of the growth strategy is to hedge against the volatility of the Houston market, which is presently in the grips of a slump in oil prices. The firm also works in Egypt and throughout the St. John corridor in the province of New Brunswick, Canada.

"We stick with what we know how to do. If you do that, you get repeat business and new business."

"Entrepreneurism is a big piece of our business plan," Brown says.

But Powers Brown could probably have stayed put and worked within its well-crafted comfort zone – tilt wall construction in which a building's walls are cast in concrete, on-site, and tilted into place.

After all, the firm designed the \$417-million campus and tilt wall facility for Japan-based Daikin Industries Ltd., an HVAC manufacturer based in Osaka. The northwest Houston plant, which will employ as many as 6,000 workers, won the gold award for the 2015 Economic Development Deal of

the Year bestowed by *Business Facilities* magazine. According to *Tilt-Up Today*, an industry advocate that covers the construction industry, the Daikin plant is the largest tilt wall building in the world.

Powers Brown has been an award winner and a newsmaker for years, and among its more notable projects are the Roy Kelly Multimodal Terminal in Bryan, Texas, which includes parking, office, and retail, and the Annapolis Junction Building 6 in Annapolis, Maryland, which meets certain Department of Defense security requirements.

Joe Powers, a co-founder and principal at Powers Brown, says the key to the firm's ability to engage in a new line of business was based on the reputation it gained designing tilt wall construction for research labs, offices, and retail buildings.

"We stick with what we know how to do," Powers says. "If you do that, you get repeat business and new business."

By the time developers started asking the firm about high-rise condos in one of the Sun Belt's most dynamic real estate markets, Powers Brown had 15 years of contacts, experience, and results – enough to vault the firm's name to the top of the list.

"It was just connections we had in the industry," Brown says. "We already had a reputation for quality."

With the advent of a new business segment, and a glossy one at that, the firm is still intent on staying with what it does best – cost efficient, time efficient tilt wall. With a focus on its core business unchanged, it is the new line of work, and the new markets, that are being built piece by piece.

"We have to temper growth and put it into our business model," Brown says. "We don't want to do too much." ▀

OPINION



Decisions made easy

As leaders in the A/E/P and environmental consulting industry, how we approach the decision process can be as important as the decision itself.



**Bill
Murphey**

**CONTINUING
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We all make dozens of decisions each day. Some are relatively simple, such as which shirt to wear in the morning. Others are complex, such as deciding whether or not to go public with your company.

Some decisions are self-generated, while others are pushed upon you. For example, I forced you to make a decision about reading this article. Would it be relevant? Would I learn from it? Would it be worth my time, or just another time moocher?

“How many decisions are you faced with each day and how do you approach them?”

I know a former CEO who was so overwhelmed by the dozens of decisions he had to make each day. Some were literally life-or-death decisions. “Frankie” made some very logical, rational, and tough decisions during his tenure, but his home life was another story. When he had to make simple decisions at home, he absolutely locked up.

Frankie’s low point came after a particularly stressful week at work. When he and his wife, “Lola,” went out for dinner at a local restaurant,

he froze at the sight of his menu. Beef, chicken, pork, seafood, vegetarian, salad, or pasta. His eyes glazed. Each menu category had sub-options, giving him dozens of combinations from which to choose. It was overwhelming.

How many decisions are you faced with each day and how do you approach them? Here are several approaches you could take.

■ **Cut the clutter.** I’ve seen a lot of enterprising project managers build elaborate PowerPoint presentations for their clients describing in excruciating detail the logic behind their recommendations. It was not uncommon to have over 150 slides of graphs, pictures, quotations, and caveats. How does one respond when presented with a mountain of details before making a decision? I cut out the clutter. Eliminate the information that doesn’t directly contribute to a decision.

I’ve worked for a C-suite executive who set a limit on the number of slides he would view on a given

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project. If you couldn't persuade him in three slides, then your logic was faulty. I was allowed as many back-up slides as needed to support my analysis and recommendation, but he did not want to see more than three slides. That approach made it easier for him to digest the information and ask the questions that were important to him. He trusted me to look at every angle of a project, but he wanted it presented in a format tailored to the way he processed information.

- **Break decisions into bite-sized chunks.** Back to my CEO friend, Frankie. Years earlier, he had made a brilliant decision and married a wonderful woman who understood how he made decisions. Sensing Frankie's dinner meltdown, Lola took over and broke the menu into bite-sized chunks for him. She offered him a simple yes/no choice. "Frankie, would you like a Caesar salad? No? I know you enjoy a good steak. Would you like a ribeye cooked medium-rare?" Her approach allowed Frankie to continue processing the more complex decisions, while she guided him through the simple ones.
- **Keep it simple.** Is anyone in today's connected environment really going to read your 60-page white paper on the pros and cons of granite versus marble? Oftentimes, a one- or two-page paper is all that's needed to convince someone about the benefits of one over the other. A one-page paper is much harder to write than a 60-page paper, but they're usually more powerful.

"Don't waste time making a decision that won't really matter tomorrow. For the complex problems, I make better decisions when I take a break from the issue."

How long are your proposals to your potential clients? Cover the critical information, but keep your proposals brief, to the point, and without the extra buzzwords. That will help them make a decision without having to wade through extraneous blabber.

- **Sleep on it.** Studies have shown the old adage "sleep on it" has merit. For simple decisions, such as chicken or beef, either answer is correct, so don't waste time making a decision that won't really matter tomorrow. For the

complex problems, I make better decisions when I take a break from the issue. I've found that running clears my head and allows me the space to think, while playing solitaire on my iPad, with its linear structure of columns and suits, helps me organize my thoughts. Find an activity that helps you think clearly.

"Keep track of the major decisions you make along with a short explanation of your rationale for that decision. That will come in handy if your decision is later questioned or your firm is revisiting the same issue."

- **Set a deadline.** I recently led an exercise for an MBA class where I gave them an hour to develop a marketing plan for a given product. Nearly every student told me they wished they had more time, yet they all finished within the allotted time. How much more time would have been enough to decide on a better plan? If I had allotted three hours, it would have taken them three hours to make a decision.
- **Write it down.** One of my mentors confided in me that he could not remember the details of many of the decisions he made while he was in charge of a \$400 million organization. That's a little frightening! Fortunately, he had a great executive assistant who kept track of those things for him.

Keep track of the major decisions you make along with a short explanation of your rationale for that decision. That will come in handy if your decision is later questioned or your firm is revisiting the same issue.

Decision making can be stressful if you allow it to take over your life. With a few simple techniques, you can minimize the stress involved in a range of decisions. Simplify the issue, spend some time away from it, set a deadline for your decision, make the decision, and move on! Indecision is a decision and it can be very painful for those who are depending on you. ▀

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GOOD TO KNOW



A NEW SEMINAR FOR A GROWING FIRMS

Solid financial management is crucial to the success of any company, and firms in the AEC industry are no exception. This course aims to provide an overview of business financial management specifically tailored to our industry to help firm leaders make informed decisions. Topics covered include interpreting financial statements, key performance metrics, benchmarking and predictive cash flow management, and how strategic decisions drive the value of the firm.

Better Financial Management is a one-day seminar that was specifically developed to help design and technical professionals become more comfortable dealing with financial management and accounting. This course helps attendees become better stewards of the company's resources and to better understand how to leverage resources and maximize profit.

Attendees learn:

- Basic principles of accounting and why they matter
- To understand the difference in cash and accrual accounting
- How to read and interpret an income statement and balance sheet
- How strategic cash flow tips for cash management
- How to use benchmarking data to guide firm-wide results
- To understand the key performance metrics essential to your firm
- To understand backlog, pipeline, and cash flow reporting

Who should attend:

Attending the Better Financial Management seminar will help design and technical professionals, principals, managers, architects, engineers, planners, scientists, surveyors, designers who need a better understanding of the financial factors affecting architecture, engineering, planning, and environmental consulting firms.

Continuing education:

Attendees of Better Financial Management can earn 4.5 CEUs. Zweig Group is registered with the AIA for continuing professional education credits. All attendees receive a certificate of attendance indicating the number of credit hours approved by the AIA.