

## Finding good people

Give recruiting the attention it deserves. Create a recruiting budget and follow these three tips from Mark Zweig.

If you look at any sports team, recruiting is an important job – one they have someone capable of doing – and an area they’re willing to spend money on. So what’s wrong with A/E/P and environmental firms?



Mark Zweig

EDITORIAL

I have always wondered why recruiting is not a more prominent function in the majority of A/E/P and environmental firms. It seems obvious that if all a firm sells is the individual and collective talents of its people that acquiring those talents would be an important priority. It isn’t.

The majority of firms in this business (68 percent, according to ZweigWhite’s 2013-2014 Operating Expenses Survey) don’t even budget for recruiting! Even fewer have a designated individual in charge of the function. And when they do, more often than not it is a gatekeeper whose role is to keep bad apples out rather than a sales person whose job is to reel good people in (an important distinction as far as I am concerned!).

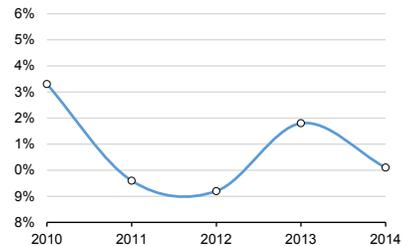
If you look at any sports team, recruiting is an important job – one they have someone capable of doing – and an area they’re willing to spend money on. So what’s wrong with A/E/P and environmental firms? Why don’t they get it?

I am fairly certain that one reason is that many firm owners still believe “low overhead” is the way to be successful in this business. Sure, it’s nice to have a low break even point or income threshold

See MARK ZWEIG, page 2

## TRENDLINES

### No urge to leave



Overall turnover rate – which indicates the annual percentage of employees who have left a firm compared to total employees – decreased this year to 10.1 percent, according to ZweigWhite’s 2014 Financial Performance Survey. While it rose to 11.8 percent in 2013, the overall turnover rate had been on a decline in the previous years. The median overall turnover rate dropped from a five-year high of 13.3 percent in 2010 to 9.6 percent in 2011, and then to 9.2 percent in 2012.

– Margot Suydam, Survey Manager

## FIRM INDEX

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Affinis Corp.....                         | 11 |
| Apex Companies, LLC.....                  | 12 |
| Braun Intertec.....                       | 12 |
| Chambers Group, Inc.....                  | 4  |
| Delcan.....                               | 12 |
| Hunt, Guillot and Associates.....         | 3  |
| HuntonBrady Architects.....               | 9  |
| MES – A PSI Company.....                  | 12 |
| Midwest Engineering Services, Inc.....    | 12 |
| Parsons.....                              | 12 |
| Pond & Company.....                       | 9  |
| Professional Service Industries, Inc..... | 12 |
| Southwest Geoscience.....                 | 12 |
| Wantman Group, Inc.....                   | 11 |
| W.K. Dickson & Co., Inc.....              | 9  |
| WSP Global Inc.....                       | 3  |

## ALSO INSIDE

- SEARCH SAVVY: Hire a sourcer. Page 7
- FINANCE: CFOs expect the unexpected. Page 11

## WORKFORCE FOCUS ISSUE

How to avoid poaching problems Page 5

Office politics – The great divide Page 9

## Hot Firms on the upswing

Page 3

## A/E BUSINESS NEWS

**DODGE INDEX SLIPS:** The Dodge Momentum Index retreated 0.8 percent in March compared to February, according to McGraw Hill Construction. The March Momentum Index came in at 113.8 (2000=100), down from a revised 114.8 in February and 118.3 in January.

While the longer term trend is still viewed as positive, the Momentum Index appears to be experiencing a temporary pause. Uncertainty, perhaps related to the weak employment growth at the start of the year, is the likely contributor to this short-term unease.

The Momentum Index is a monthly measure of the first (or initial) report for nonresidential building projects in planning, which have been shown to lead construction spending for nonresidential buildings by a full year.

Uncertainty weighed on both the commercial and institutional sides of the Momentum Index in March. New plans for commercial buildings fell 1 percent, as declines for offices and hotels offset an increase for retail buildings. Despite the pullback for offices, the most significant commercial building to enter the planning pipeline in March was the \$250 million 6 Houston Center Office Building in Texas.

New plans for institutional buildings dropped 0.7 percent in the latest month. A decline in the volume of education projects was only partially offset by the inclusion of two large amusement and healthcare-related developments – the \$300 million E23 Casino and Hotel proposed in Albany, N.Y. and the \$250 million Women and Children’s Hospital slated for Lakeland, Fla.

**ASLA HQ IS GREEN:** The headquarters of the American Society of Landscape Architects helped Washington, D.C., rank second on the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s 2014 list of the top U.S. cities with the most ENERGY STAR certified buildings.

Cities are ranked on the list by how many buildings earned the prestigious ENERGY STAR in their area last year. ASLA’s headquarters was one of 435 ENERGY STAR certified buildings in 2013 that helped Washington, D.C., make the list.

To earn EPA’s ENERGY STAR, buildings must be more energy efficient than 75 percent of similar buildings across the country.

ASLA has participated in EPA’s ENERGY STAR certification since 2008, and its headquarters building was ENERGY STAR-certified again in 2013. Among buildings the same size, ASLA’s energy performance is in the top 11 percent. ASLA’s headquarters employs energy-efficient systems and practices – including a green roof that reduces energy usage by 10 percent in winter months. Sustainability is part of the organization’s leadership and staff culture.

ASLA’s green roof was designed by Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates, a leading landscape architecture firm. Some key benefits include reduced building heating and cooling costs and reduced stormwater runoff.

The green roof reduces energy usage by 10 percent in winter months. It also does not contribute to D.C.’s urban heat island effect as it has been as much as 59 degrees cooler than conventional black roofs on neighboring buildings.

More than 23,000 buildings across America earned EPA’s ENERGY STAR certification in 2013. These buildings saved more than \$3.1 billion on utility bills and prevented greenhouse gas emissions equal to the annual electricity used by more than 2.2 million homes.

### MARK ZWEIG, from page 1

you have to hit every month. But rarely is a low cost/high volume strategy the way to succeed in this business, or any small business. More often than not, a higher-priced, lower volume strategy has a greater chance of success. You can see it in A/E firms. Higher profit firms tend to have higher multipliers and higher overhead.

In any case, if you’re serious about finding good people today, you’ve got to get creative. Here are some places you should be looking:

**1) Current employees.** Have you really given serious consideration to moving someone who’s already in the firm to the role you need to fill now? Yes, it may cause some problems for you in one area if you transfer or promote, but it could also help you keep someone good who will feel the company really does give opportunities to its people. Look down the ranks. The next tier below where your need is may not be the place to find what you need. Be willing to consider younger/less experienced internal candidates IF they have the attitude, character, and work ethic it takes to overcome a lack of years.

**2) Former employees.** Who used to

work there that you’d like to have back? Many times people leave a company for greener pastures only to find out they weren’t as green as they hoped they’d be. Call these people! They may be thrilled to come back. Plus, having someone leave and come back may provide a valuable lesson to the rest of your staff.

### 3) People working for competitors.

They clearly know something AND they may be able to bring along some clients and/or other employees. That helps you and deals a blow to your competition at the same time. Good stuff! Meet them at professional society events. Talk to manufacturers who are trying to get you to spec their products. Talk to contractors. Talk to clients. All of these people, working in other firms, are potential lead sources for good talent. Get on your competitor’s websites and you’ll often find all their people listed there. Or just call your competitors and ask, “Who is your \_\_\_\_\_?, or who are your \_\_\_\_\_s?” You may be surprised what they’ll tell you.

**You want growth? You want happy clients? Then you need a better-than-good staff. Give recruiting the attention it deserves. ▶▶**

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## 1ST QUARTER

# Hot Firms on the upswing

Now that the first quarter of 2014 is behind us, we checked in with a few 2013 Hot Firm leaders to see how things are going so far.

By LIISA SULLIVAN  
Correspondent

**I**s the economic recovery reaching the A/E/P and environmental consulting business? As economists will usually say, construction is a lagging indicator of economic recovery. Hesitant indicators such as the Architecture Billings Index and the Dodge Momentum Index are evidence of the fact.

So, **THE ZWEIG LETTER** approached three 2013 Hot Firm winners about their prospects in 2014 now that quarter one is over. So far, so good.

**FOUR PILLARS LEAD THE WAY.** Isabelle Adjahi, director communications and investor relations, **WSP Global Inc.** (Montréal, QB), a management and consultancy services firm to the built and natural environment, says that as of Dec. 31, 2013, it had a backlog of \$1,496.8 million and approximately 8.9 months of revenues – this is up \$76.2 million, or 5.4 percent, compared to a year earlier. In addition, the company had a “soft backlog” of \$518.2 million at the end of 2013, an increase of \$63.2 million, or 13.9 percent, compared to the previous year.

“The soft backlog relates to master service agreements signed with clients for which the value of work to be carried out is not specified,” Adjahi says. “Both backlog and soft backlog remained strong on a consolidated basis in 2013, compared to 2012. Variation in backlog by operating segment year over year is indicative of current activity levels experienced by our operations in various parts of the world.”

Currently, hiring at WSP depends on region. On a global basis, net is stable. The company has downsized in Canada, but has hired in the U.S. and Colombia.

In 2013, WSP clearly outlined its global 2015 strategy, which should result in value creation and align the company’s actions with the long-term interests of all its stakeholders, including clients, employees and investors.

“Four strategic cornerstones provide the framework for the company’s global strategy, which is based on everyone’s concerted efforts to build a strong global brand, WSP, and a strong company culture, supported by best-practice corporate governance and ethics,” Adjahi says.



Trotter Hunt,  
Executive VP,  
Hunt, Guillot and  
Associates.



Craig Neslage,  
Executive VP,  
Manager of  
Operations,  
Chambers Group,  
Inc.

The cornerstones are:

- **People.** WSP aims to be the preferred employer in its industry and increase employee head count to 20,000 by 2015.
- **Clients.** WSP aims to be the first choice for all its clients in its local, national and international markets, maintaining a diverse and balanced mix of private and public sector clients, as well as a diverse mix of projects of all size. The objective of the company is to increase the number of key global clients, namely clients it serves in more than three countries, with the goal of generating 10 percent of total revenues from these clients by 2015.
- **Expertise.** WSP aims to expand the scope of its expertise and its global presence through the acquisition of complementary and like-minded firms, and through organic growth. The objective of the company is to reach \$2.3 billion in net revenues by the end of 2015, which should include approximately \$500 million in net revenues through acquisitions.
- **Operational excellence.** WSP aims to constantly improve the way it operates, to achieve the highest standards of client service and project delivery. The objective of the company is to consistently deliver projects and services of the highest quality, on time and on budget.

**ALL INCLUSIVE SERVICE PROVIDER.** At **Hunt, Guillot and Associates** (Ruston, LA), a 350-person multi-disciplined project management and engineering services firm, business is also on the upswing.

Trotter Hunt, executive vice president, says the backlog this year is expected to be stronger than it was in 2013. He attributes this good news to a better business climate and client mix.

“Last year, we added two additional offices and expanded one. We are now expanding those offices, along with other larger support offices over the next year.”

“We’re looking to hire more people this year,” he says. “Last year, we added two additional offices and expanded one. We are now expanding those offices, along with other larger support offices over the next year.”

Some of HGA’s expansion in 2013 happened overseas.

“This year, our Dubai office will be capitalizing on opportunities primarily in the Middle East and North Africa,” Hunt says. “While HGA continues to focus business development efforts on oil and gas projects such as pipeline design and associated pipeline facilities, the firm is poised to become its clients’ first choice as an all-inclusive service provider of program man-

See HOT FIRMS, page 4

## IN BRIEF

**2013 LEED FOR HOMES AWARD WINNERS ANNOUNCED:** The U.S. Green Building Council has named the recipients of the 2013 LEED for Homes Awards, recognizing projects, developers and homebuilders that have demonstrated outstanding leadership in residential green building. The award categories recognize innovative multi- and single-family projects, production builders, affordable housing projects and developers, an overall commitment to LEED for Homes and Project of the Year.

Winners for this year include:

**Outstanding Single Family Home of the Year:** Wallace Residence (Earthship Farmstead), Kaplan Thompson Architects. Located in Stuart, Va., Earthship Farmstead is an earth-sheltered, LEED Platinum, energy-positive certified Passive House that also operates as a working water buffalo farm.

**Outstanding Commitment to LEED:** AMLI Residential, based in Kennesaw, Ga., a preeminent company working to develop, acquire and manage green apartment communities.

**Outstanding Affordable Developer:** Blue Sea Development Co. LLC. Since 2006, every new construction project undertaken by New York

City affordable housing developer Blue Sea Development Co. has earned LEED for Homes certification, demonstrating a trajectory of continuous improvement, fearless innovation and large-scale development of certified green housing.

**Outstanding Multifamily Project:** Vulcan Real Estate, for Stack House. Situated on a full city block in the emerging South Lake Union neighborhood of Seattle, the Stack House project seeks to combine two new mixed-use residential projects with the restoration and adaptive reuse of the Supply Laundry Building, a historic landmark.

**Outstanding Multifamily Builder:** AMLI Residential is responsible for AMLI at Escena, a wood-frame, garden-style, LEED Gold, 440-unit apartment community in Irving, Texas.

**Project of the Year:** Union 4, Nakhshab Development & Design. Union 4 is a LEED Platinum multifamily development by Nakhshab Development and Design in the Banker's Hill neighborhood of San Diego.

**Outstanding Affordable Project:** Kalos, Community HousingWorks. Kalos provides 83 vibrant new affordable workforce homes in a smart growth/sustainable setting.

## HOT FIRMS, from page 3

agement, construction management, and staffing expertise throughout multiple industries.”

HGA also opened a branch in Lake Charles, La. to support the industrial expansion in the area. Due to existing pipeline infrastructure, port facilities, and industrial manufacturing, the region is experiencing a renaissance in gas to liquids projects and chemical plant expansions.

“HGA has a strong background in government, economic development, public policy, and general engineering fields that will be valuable to the area,” Hunt says.

Hunt says that while 2014's first quarter was not quite as strong as quarter one in 2013, it is an improvement from quarter four in 2013.

“We had a large project that was in full swing in quarter one of 2013. Many of our employees were working 10-15 hours of overtime per week and we had a number of temporary field personnel. We are just starting an uptick in work in 2014 and we do not expect it to crest until quarter three,” he says.

**GETTING BACK TO BUSINESS.** Craig

Neslage, executive vice president, manager of operations, **Chambers Group, Inc.** (Santa Ana, CA), a 100-person environmental consulting firm, says that business has picked up this year as well.

The most active market sectors in Southern California for the firm's environmental services and general planning are energy, transportation, and public works – including water projects.

“In 2013, the ongoing projects for clients appeared to be going through a ‘careful’ funding stage as we and others experienced reduced budgets and/or extended schedules,” Neslage says. “Also, several large alternative energy (solar) projects in ‘Socal’ were put on hold in 2013 because their intent to produce hundreds of mega-watts of power was determined more than the grid could use. As a result, project developers redesigned or reconsidered.”

In 2014, opportunities are appearing from municipalities for road widening, from the local major utility companies for transmission distribution line projects, and water infrastructure projects are being funded. Also, several municipalities are updating their general plans or elements of those plans.

“Things are looking up,” Neslage says.



## RESOURCES

### 2014 POLICIES, PROCEDURES & BENEFITS SURVEY

The key to growing your firm and reaching your strategic goals often rests with the quality of your employees, and the quality of your firm's policies, procedures, and benefits is critical to hiring and retaining a top-notch workforce. But with benefits costs spiraling out of control, you also need to keep a close eye on the bottom line. How do you draw the line between offering benefits to attract the right staff to your firm and costly expenses that will break the bank?

The 2014 Policies, Procedures & Benefits Survey of Architecture, Engineering, Planning & Environmental Consulting Firms will help you benchmark your firm against industry standards so you can find out if you're overspending on benefits and compensation. The survey will also provide you with industry norms on policies and procedures so you can support your policy decisions with hard data. Get all the benchmarks you need on compensation policies, benefits, HR staff, and other major HR issues. The results are broken down by firm type, size, region, and other factors so you can make comparisons between your firm and others just like it.

For more information or to order a copy, call 800-466-6275 or long on to [www.zweigwhite.com/p-2191-policies-procedures-benefits-survey-2014](http://www.zweigwhite.com/p-2191-policies-procedures-benefits-survey-2014).

## WORKFORCE

# How to avoid poaching problems

There are steps to reduce the possibility of a mass exodus. Also consider that recruiting from the competition may be OK.

By LIISA SULLIVAN  
Correspondent

“**P**oaching” (also referred to as passive talent), is when a member of your team is actively courted while in your employment and encouraged to join your competition. No one is immune, but there are ways to protect your firm from being a casualty.

**7 WAYS TO PROTECT FROM POACHING.** Recruiter.com, an online resource that connects recruiters, employers, and job seekers, provides strategies to help you be poach-free:

- 1) Turnover analysis.** For starters, do some analysis of voluntary resignations and try to determine how many of those people went to competitors. Chances are some of them were actively approached either by traditional means or via social media.
- 2) Non-solicitation clauses.** Staff could be at risk for being poached by former employees who have started their own business or are working elsewhere. You can reduce the chances of this happening by including six- to 12-month non-solicitation agreements in all your employment contracts so former employees are legally barred from poaching your staff for a period of time.
- 3) Review staff/set goals on a quarterly basis.** Some of the top reasons employees resign include: limited career/promotion opportunities, poor supervisor relationship, compensation, and lack of challenge. Unhappy employees are easy poaching targets. Make sure goals are clear and address problems quickly. Once-a-year performance reviews are no longer adequate. Check in often. In fact, research from Bersin by Deloitte shows that companies that set goals quarterly drive more than 30 percent more productivity than those that set goals annually.
- 4) Benchmark salaries and benefits regularly.** Review your salaries once a year to check that they are in line with the competition. Salaries have become volatile in today’s talent-stressed climate, particularly in shortage/high-growth areas like IT. Within a year, you could find that your salaries are falling behind, making you susceptible to poaching. Also, consider perks like flexible work schedules. If your salaries and perks fall short, employees are susceptible to advances. Don’t make it easy for them.
- 5) Use personal development plans.** Make sure employees always have personal development targets and are working toward continuing professional development and career development. Lack of career



Mike Sweeny,  
Principal,  
MAS Recruiting.

## GOOD TO KNOW

Less than half of principals (43 percent) have signed a non-compete agreement with their current firm.

**Source:**  
2014 Principals, Partners & Owners Survey, ZweigWhite: [www.zweigwhite.com/p-2193-principals-partners-owners-survey-2014](http://www.zweigwhite.com/p-2193-principals-partners-owners-survey-2014).

opportunities makes employees moving targets too.

- 6) Always advertise vacancies internally.** Invite all staff to apply to help build a sense of an internal job market and career opportunities. This will help to protect from external approaches as well.
- 7) Encourage staff to propose new tasks/responsibilities for themselves.** Smaller companies may have limited job openings. As a result, make it clear to employees that they are free to propose new tasks/responsibilities that will challenge them or provide a developmental opportunity. Depending on the value/cost to the business, grant the employee’s requests.

**FAIR GAME; BUT PLAY NICE.** On the flip side, if a firm sees talent going to waste at another firm, it’s fair game to approach. But do so with caution, advises Mike Sweeny, principal of MAS Recruiting in Cherry Hill, N.J.

“You don’t want to get a reputation as a poacher,” he says. Here are some things to consider before you take the leap:

- **Be subtle.** Hiring a search firm can take you out of the loop.
- **Look both ways before you cross.** Make sure the person you want to hire is worth the effort. A great résumé does not always equal a great candidate. You need to consider references and company culture too.
- **Be a legal eagle.** Find out if the candidate has a non-compete agreement with their current employer. If they do, and they jump ship to join your firm, you could be in trouble. An employment lawyer can advise you on how best to proceed.
- **Sell yourself.** When all is said and done and you’ve decided that this is the person for you, you still have to sell them on what you company has to offer. And it’s not always about money. There’s also recognition, opportunity, innovation and more.
- **What goes around comes around.** Your competitors are likely playing the same game. Make sure to treat your employees well. Know who your stars are and make sure they’re well taken care of and paid well.

In the end analysis, Sweeny says that it’s actually a good idea to recruit stars from the competition for upper management/principal positions.

“This type of recruiting makes a lot of sense from a business standpoint because these candidates know your industry better than candidates from non-competitors. Candidates from the competition will be able to come up to speed much faster and also may be in a position to bring business to your company,” he says. “Just know what you are up against.”



# An effective management plan

How to write an effective “management plan” section of a federal government proposal.

Second of a two-part article.

**A**s stated in the first part of the article, published last week, other chapters of a federal proposal focus on the quality and depth of the assets you will provide under the contract – your personnel, subcontractors and consultants, specialized equipment, expertise, and so forth. The management chapter focuses primarily on how you will *orchestrate* these assets.

Part 1 identified four ways in which you can achieve these goals: 1) demonstrate tangible measures of relevant management success; 2) demonstrate that you understand the specific management challenges that this particular contract will present; 3) describe specific procedures that you will tailor and apply for this particular contract; and 4) describe an organizational approach that will resonate well with the procuring agency.

Here are four more ways that you can write an effective management plan.

**1) Demonstrate that you understand the procuring agency’s milieu.** Your management plan should reflect a sophisticated understanding of the agency’s general approach – its “culture” – for interacting with contractors. For example, is either of the following two scenarios accurate for the procurement you are considering?

*Scenario A.* The agency has a highly sophisticated internal technical staff and believes (correctly) that it could perform the work being procured were it not for the relatively small size of their internal roster. The contractor will be viewed as a valued partner to help correct the agency’s short-handed status; but the agency expects to be fully involved in providing technical leadership and vision for the project, and expects the contractor staff members to treat agency staff as their technical peers.

*Scenario B.* The agency believes (correctly) that it does not have the appropriate technical expertise in-house. The agency is looking for the contractor to provide technical leadership. The agency is looking for a management approach in which the contractor will do a fair amount of technical hand holding along the way and help educate staff on technical issues so that they can make informed choices during the course of the project.

Knowing which scenario is the correct one should help set the tone of your management plan and can affect many of the specific procedures that you propose (e.g., procedures



Dave Alexander

GUEST  
SPEAKER

you propose for obtaining agency reviews of methodologies). Guessing wrong can be problematic. If you incorrectly guess *Scenario A*, you may lead the evaluation panel to conclude that you do not pay sufficient attention to the need to help the agency make informed choices along the way. If you incorrectly guess *Scenario B*, you may create the aura of arrogance or patronization.

**2) Explicitly prove your commitment to the contract.** Successful management plans create a sense that the proposing firm is excited about the prospect of winning the contract and performing excellent work. You can best achieve this by making sure that you are making the following points within your management plan:

- The work being procured is squarely within your firm’s business focus. It does not represent a “flyer” – an opportunity for your firm to try to spread its wings, using this contract as a test case.

See DAVE ALEXANDER, page 8

Successful management plans create a sense that the proposing firm is excited about the prospect of winning the contract and performing excellent work.

# Hire a sourcer

Need help identifying targets for potential recruiting?  
The answer is in the headline.

Sometimes in the recruiting world, you'll hear the term "sourcing." It sounds like something you would hear in the buying/procurement business, right? But when a recruiter talks about "sourcing" they're referring to that part of the recruiting organization/process that is tasked with leveraging a wide variety of search methods intended to unearth professionals who demonstrate relevance for a particular open position. In other words, "sourcers" do exactly what their title implies – they source talent.

The difference between a sourcer and a recruiter is that sourcers are typically not charged with developing candidates, while recruiters are. Rather, sourcers are charged almost exclusively with identifying "targets" who can be developed into candidates (the term "target," by the way, is a rather cold industry designation for professionals who appear to possess the relevant skills, experiences and credentials for a particular job opening, but have not yet indicated their interest in said opening).

Because sourcers are charged with only identifying potential targets, they will typically specialize in just the initial procurement of names, profiles, bios, résumés, etc. of relevant professionals. The targets are then referred to a recruiter to be either dismissed or pursued further, based upon the information the sourcer provided.

It's really quite an effective recruiting method. It's not uncommon for larger companies to employ entire teams dedicated strictly to sourcing as a way to "feed" recruiters with a consistent batch of relevant targets who can then be approached by the recruiter for further development as candidates (i.e. qualification, interview, and ultimately placement). In some cases, sourcers are utilized only tactically to simply monitor and scour major résumé banks, and then to hand off their findings to an assigned recruiter.

However, other companies will leverage sourcers much more strategically. They often fill very difficult searches by using their sourcers to identify talent from non-traditional sources that go well beyond the active candidate realm of résumé banks and into the much more prolific (and less visible) realm where highly sought-after "passive" candidates dwell (i.e. association directories, conference attendee lists, articles, news releases, etc.).

Clearly, there are numerous advantages to hiring a sourcer to compliment your existing recruiting team. If your firm has grown to a point where more than one recruiter is necessary, it may be worth considering hiring a sourcing



Jeremy  
Clarke

SEARCH  
SAVVY

specialist, as opposed to another recruiter. Typically (but not always), a sourcer is more junior in their overall recruiting experience than a recruiter, and can therefore be hired at a lesser salary. The addition of a sourcer will likely improve your candidate pool dramatically and free your recruiter to focus on qualifying/assessing candidates, as opposed to the time-intensive effort of researching/identifying targets. This alone should radically help improve both your quality-of-hire and your time-to-fill metrics.

Considering the financial advantages and the advantages to candidate quality, you may be now seriously thinking about introducing a sourcer into your recruiting team's efforts. In that case, you may be asking: "What are the characteristics that make for a good sourcer?"

See JEREMY CLARKE, page 8

The next time you have a recruiting position to fill, take a moment to consider the benefits of hiring a sourcer instead. An Internet-savvy, intuitive, analytical, disciplined, tenacious sourcer is an invaluable resource in the war to win talent.

JEREMY CLARKE, from page 7

What traits should I be looking for?" Good questions. There are many, but here are three traits that I find to be absolutely critical:

- 1) Internet-savvy.** Good sourcers know how to navigate the Internet. They know how to use Boolean search language to create very specific search parameters that yield very specific results. They are also extremely intuitive. They can discern relationships in the information and the profiles they surface. I call them "information detectives." In other words, good sourcers know where to find information and, moreover, they know how to interpret the information they find in a way that leads them to greater repositories of information and broader pools of potential candidates.
- 2) Analytical.** Good sourcers are into the details – they revel in it. They don't get bored easily with duplicative and analytical exercises. They love research, so they can sit in front of a computer for hours looking at countless lines of information without their eyes glazing over; all the while enjoying the challenge of finding a needle in a haystack.
- 3) Disciplined/tenacious.** Good sourcers plan their work and then execute their plan consistently. They know exactly what they're going after and exactly how to prioritize their efforts.

They don't give up easily on a search. The more obstacles and brick walls they face, the more determined they become to find the honey hole. They'll do it just like that every single day. In my experience, former analysts have historically proven to make the best sourcers.

**FINAL THOUGHTS.** An important asterisk on this article is this: Sourcers are typically researchers, not recruiters, and should be utilized differently. I don't recommend that sourcers begin the initial engagement with the targets they identify – especially passive targets. Play the strengths of your team without confusing their purpose. Also, keep in mind that the purpose of hiring a sourcer is ultimately to eliminate reliance upon other sourcing means. Because that's true, the expectations you build into the position should be centered upon candidate quality, not quantity.

The next time you have a recruiting position to fill, take a moment to consider the benefits of hiring a sourcer instead. An Internet-savvy, intuitive, analytical, disciplined, tenacious sourcer is an invaluable resource in the war to win talent. ▽▲

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DAVE ALEXANDER, from page 6

- Because this contract is in your core business area, your staff would view working on this contract as an opportunity to further their career advancement within the firm – and this in turn will help ensure personnel continuity on the contract over the long term.
  - In recognition of the importance of this contract, you are proposing an excellent program manager, with just the right combination of technical and managerial skills. (Provide succinct, explicit details to back up this assertion.)
  - You are proposing an organizational approach that will give this project excellent visibility with your senior corporate management.
- 3) Describe how your firm will manage subcontractors and consultants.** If you're proposing a team of subcontractors and consultants, it will be to your advantage if you have worked together successfully in the past on other similar contracts. If this is the case, your proposal should emphasize this history of successful, proven working relationships. Many evaluation panels will give more credence to a prime contractor's claimed ability to orchestrate the work successfully if there is tangible evidence that team members have forged successful working relationships in the past. In addition, it can be useful to emphasize themes such as the following in your management plans:
- There is a specific rationale for the inclusion of each of your proposed subcontractors and consultants. Panel members sometimes surmise that some subcontractors or consultants were added only for their marquee value, not for well-articulated technical reasons.
  - As the prime contractor, you will take ultimate and full

responsibility for the quality of all work performed by your subcontractors and consultants.

- You will ensure excellent communication among all team members. You will arrange for key subcontractor staff to participate in all relevant communications with the client.
  - Your firm will not try to block the client's access to subcontractors and consultants. You will invite the client to communicate with all team members, subject only to any limitations specified in the contract.
  - You will assign work to the team member who is best equipped for each task. You will not try to keep work in-house (e.g., to meet internal labor revenue goals) if the work would be better or more efficiently performed by a subcontractor or consultant.
  - You will have business-like arrangements with each subcontractor and consultant.
- 4) Ghost out the competition.** You may want to place special emphasis on management areas in which other contractors for the agency have stumbled in the recent past. For example, you may know that another contractor for the agency on a similar contract had a lot of turnover of personnel on the project team. In your proposal, it might be useful for you to be sure to include a sophisticated discussion of the importance of personnel continuity. Do not identify or explicitly criticize the other contractor; simply be straightforward and objective in describing your understanding of the importance of personnel continuity, and your management approaches for minimizing turnover. ▽▲

DAVE ALEXANDER, Lincoln Strategies, LLC ([www.LincolnStrategies.com](http://www.LincolnStrategies.com)), authored ZweigWhite's "Guide to Winning Federal Government Contracts for AEC & Environmental Firms" (2nd Edition), on which this article is based. Reach him at [da@LincolnStrategies.com](mailto:da@LincolnStrategies.com).

## WORKFORCE

# Office politics – The great divide

When strong management and incredible talent come together ‘self-promoting’ is not necessary and office politics are kept at bay.

By LIISA SULLIVAN  
Correspondent

The expression “office politics” immediately brings negative images – people jockeying for position and pushing peers to the curb. As a result, firms make every effort to elude them. Proper handling of promotions, positive leadership and open lines of communication are key.

“Office politics can actually be cancerous and create great divide,” says Pam Gower, associate and director of human resources, **Pond & Company** (Norcross, GA), a 238-person architecture, engineering and planning firm. “If a company is not careful, people will forget that they are all in it together and the ship goes down.”

“Office politics can actually be cancerous and create great divide. If a company is not careful, people will forget that they are all in it together and the ship goes down.”

**PROMOTE FAIRLY; WELL-DEFINED EXPECTATIONS HELP.** Karen Moorefield, associate and director of corporate development at **HuntonBrady Architects** (Orlando, FL), a 70-person design-oriented architecture firm, says that annual reviews set the stage for promotions. Career development, job description and performance are reviewed and assistance is provided as needed. While reviews do not result in immediate promotions, they do serve to provide a list of individuals for promotion consideration. Recommendations are made by mid-level management to leadership.

“Moving to an associate level has strict criteria, and in the past, there have been some misconceptions about how it happens. Some think it’s a matter of longevity, but at HuntonBrady that’s not the case. It’s based on employee contributions, long-term value and other factors,” Moorefield says.

There have been rare instances where someone will ask, “Why not me?” On these occasions, a direct conversation with the employee provides more insight as to what goals are needed to achieve the

next level or a promotion.

“We make every effort to maintain an ‘open door and open mind’ philosophy,” Moorefield says. “When negative attitude creeps in (which rarely happens), we address it immediately.”

Alex Wilson, director of human resources at **W.K. Dickson & Co., Inc.** (Charlotte, NC), a 120-person community infrastructure firm, says that she has been with the firm for more than nine years and has never received a complaint about someone else getting a promotion. She attributes this to an expectations-based performance management system that identifies the supervisor’s and the employee’s expectations.

“If an employee wants to move up, then the supervisor works with him or her on the skills needed and necessary training to obtain those skills,” she says.

Wilson says there’s no room for office politics. Leadership needs to nip negativity in the bud in order to create a better working environment.

Gower at Pond says firm-wide performance reviews are the policy. It all starts with client survey feedback that measures the total sum of Pond’s talent in its performance, from the client perspective. This information is then summarized and provided to attendees at business planning meetings that occur just prior to the start of a new fiscal year.

All adjustments in compensation and promotions to new roles are reviewed and approved by Pond’s executive committee, whose attendees act as agents over the various divisions to support and validate the recommendations. Promotions are celebrated in August. Because of the rigorously vetted process, negativity is minimal.

“Occasionally, there are opinions – maybe more than management might actually hear. However, the vast majority of our employees are extremely team supportive, expect opportunities coming their way, have lent support to teammates in pursuit of continued growth and applaud their recognition when the time comes,” Gower says.

**DON’T APPEASE, EXPLAIN.** If a complaint occurs, Pond’s leadership works to resolve it. Sometimes the explanation can even turn into a positive learning experience.



Karen Moorefield,  
Associate and  
Director of  
Corporate  
Development,  
HuntonBrady  
Architects.



Alex Wilson,  
Director of HR,  
W.K. Dickson &  
Co., Inc.

See OFFICE POLITICS, page 10

## ON THE MOVE

**FINLEY HIRES:** **Finley Engineering Group** (Tallahassee, FL), a bridge design and construction engineering firm, welcomed a new staff member, **D. Darren Lucas**, as senior bridge engineer to its growing bridge design and construction engineering firm.

Lucas has 15 years of bridge design and construction engineering experience with an expertise in managing a variety of heavy and marine construction projects for public and private organizations. His experience as a bridge designer includes the Woodrow Wilson Memorial Bridge, Boston Central Artery, Ringling Causeway and Palm Beach International Airport Interchanges.

Lucas will be assigned to the Bayonne Bridge Replacement project where FINLEY is providing bridge design and construction engineering on the approaches.

"I was reminded of FINLEY's projects when I saw a post on LinkedIn. FINLEY integrates construction engineering into the bridge design which is a very different approach. Having worked with Craig Finley and Jerry Pfunter, I felt comfortable with the decision to further my career and return to Tallahassee with my family. I'm looking forward to being able to work on large-scale complex projects," Lucas said.

"I've known Darren for 15 years and we worked together on some challenging projects. He is a seasoned project manager and with his field experience, he understands the all-important link between design and construction on complex bridge projects," said Craig Finley, president, FINLEY.

**BASKERVILL PROMOTES:** **Baskervill** (Richmond, VA), a full-service architectural, engineering, and interior design firm, announced the appointment of two new associate principals and four new associates. New associate principals include **Alan Davis** and **Jay Woodburn**. New associates include **Elizabeth Temple**, **Jennifer Compton**, **Patricia Lopez** and **Tracey Gould**.

Davis is a registered architect, project manager, and business development professional for the financial services and corporate office divisions, providing clients such as Union First Market Bank, Essex Bank, Wells Fargo, and FedFinancial Federal Credit Union with successful design solutions to meet their organizational goals.

Woodburn serves as project manager and project architect for clients, including Virginia Military Institute, CFA Institute, Liberty University, Collegiate School Aquatics Center, and Owens & Minor. Specializing in large-scale, complex projects, Woodburn's expertise rests in tight coordination of design teams with multiple stakeholders, ensuring

projects move successfully from concept through occupancy.

Compton, associate, is an interior designer in the hospitality division and focuses on technical and sustainable design challenges and opportunities.

Lopez is an interior designer in the hospitality division and is recognized for her creative sensibility and passion for design.

Gould specializes in award-winning integrated marketing communications, including media relations, writing, and social media. Gould oversees all internal and external marketing communications, branding, and marketing assets for the firm.

**ARUP APPOINTS:** **Arup** (London, UK), a multidisciplinary engineering and consulting firm, announced that **Aidan Hughes** will take over the role of Group Leader in the San Francisco office. In this role, he will be responsible for clients, financial performance, and staff welfare for Arup's 275 staff in San Francisco. Hughes is taking over this role from Jim Quiter, who will now be leading Arup's Global Management Consulting Business.

"My focus will be on our clients and our client relationships," Hughes said. "We have a great team of people who can deliver value to our clients on all aspects of the built environment."

Hughes has spent much of his 30-year professional career at Arup and is a passionate believer in Arup's mission to "shape a better world." Hughes has advised developers and regional government on transportation and infrastructure strategies. He is a chartered civil engineer, LEED Accredited Professional and has worked in Europe, Asia and the United States.

Hughes joined Arup in 1986. He worked on major urban development and transport projects in the UK and Australia, before leading the firm's expansion in the U.S. in 2000 as a founding member of the San Francisco transport and infrastructure team. He led Arup's Planning and Consulting practice in the Americas from 2004 to 2013 and served on Arup's Americas Board from 2004 to 2009. He is a member of the Board of Directors of SPUR and is a Council member of the Urban Land Institute.

Arup's San Francisco staff provide a wide range of consulting and engineering services – projects include the California Academy of Science, the Stanford Graduate School of Business, Presidio Parkway, the Las Vegas High Roller, Concord Community Reuse Project, 181 Fremont skyscraper, and the Transbay Transit Center. Arup's San Francisco office opened in 1985, as the firm's first U.S. office.

## OFFICE POLITICS, from page 9

"We do not do appeasement well, although we have had to request patience at times," Gower says. "The issue of disagreeing with a peer's promotion is a totally different issue than one's expectation that they have earned the opportunity to be publicly promoted and have been neglected. In a situation where an employee feels overlooked, it would merit discussions with their management. If there's logic behind why the manager didn't feel compelled to suggest them for growth, we urge the manager to communicate more effectively and to be the coach the employee needs. Path them and explain what they must do to get to their destination."

Likewise, if Pond identifies potential higher management issues, it will address those immediately. HR works with both the manager and the employee with the idea of getting the employee back to being fully engaged, and with a regained

focus on producing excellence for clients.

"We do not have or foster a political environment," Gower says. "If two employees don't work well together, we call it that. If they try and ally with others, we bring it all out to light, address issues and move on so as not to foster such an environment. Generally, the art of 'political maneuvering' is used for specific reasons and our philosophy is that there are more effective, professional and appropriate ways to accomplish things."

Gower explains that if employees feel they need to campaign for recognition, then their managers are not doing their jobs effectively.

"My experience would suggest the existence and form of political maneuvering within corporate settings varies less because of the industry, market or typical employee DNA and is more about the leadership, its tolerance and style, and how close the owners are to the core of the practice." ■▲

## PROFESSION

# CFOs expect the unexpected

A lot of what they do can be described as 'other duties' as these financial professionals can attest.

By LIISA SULLIVAN  
Correspondent

CFOs are the numbers people, right? Well, in many cases, they may be doing a lot more than focusing on the balance sheet. These three CFOs share what goes on behind their closed, and often opened, doors.

**OPTIMIZING PEOPLE.** At **Wantman Group, Inc.** (West Palm Beach, FL), a 130-person multidisciplinary consulting firm that specializes in engineering, surveying and mapping, planning and environmental services, Tim Nicoulin, CFO, says he likely spends more than 50 percent of his time on "non-traditional" CFO duties.

"Having initially spent more than 15 years in the banking and insurance industry, the move to the A/E industry in 1990 and the breadth of skills needed was surprising," he says. "Generally speaking, if it's not design or marketing, it can fall to the CFO."

"Generally speaking, if it's not design or marketing, it can fall to the CFO."

In addition to his traditional CFO-related functions, such as accounting, budgeting, banking, financing and

project management administration, Nicoulin has also had is hand in many other areas, ranging from contract administration, human resources and IT to facilities management, records management and administrative services.

"It's important to optimize people who are billable to be billable," he says.

Since Nicoulin has worked in the A/E industry, he has crafted policies for email use and etiquette and worked on group insurance health policy design to attract and retain employees while maintaining reasonable costs. He has done space planning for new offices and supervised several major and minor office moves.

"I have learned (at least I think I have) a great deal about the inner world of computer hardware, soft-

ware networking and communications – and it's constantly moving forward," he says.

And while design and marketing issues rarely land on his desk, he's not afraid to route it to the appropriate person.

"No matter what needs to be done, I will either deal with it or see that it gets dealt with through delegation or by a counterpart," Nicoulin says. "The CFO role is as much about providing 'client' support as it is about doing good 'CFO work.' Your 'clients' are your management team, division heads, project managers, designers, and interns. While each of your 'clients' needs your skills, knowledge and expertise, they also need it to be delivered in a manner that is transparent and does not impede their ability to service the firm's clients."

Nicoulin says that the bottom line is that the CFO role is a "can-do one," particularly if it allows other senior executives and managers to work at their highest and best use doing other activities.

**VALUE IN LEARNING.** Kathy Minnick, controller, **Affinis Corp.** (Overland Park, KS), a 24-person transportation planning and design firm, says that as part of a small engineering firm, it's important to multi-task and handle a variety of tasks within finance and accounting.

"From reconciling petty cash, journal entries, paying bills, reviewing financial results, and assisting in strategic planning, finding enough time in a day to get everything accomplished is the biggest challenge," she says.

And, with time already being a sought-after commodity, what happens when something comes across her desk that's not really "her area?" Minnick says that, in most cases, she handles it because there's not another person in accounting to delegate the work to. There are some human resource-related tasks that overlap with finance and payroll, and the HR/recruiting manager handles those.

"I admit, there are some days that I would like the luxury of just finishing one task before moving on to the next, but in this position, that's not always reality," Minnick says. "And, I do occasionally enjoy straying away from the day-to-day duties to the more varied special projects. I try to look at the value I gain from the learning experience."



Tim Nicoulin,  
CFO, Wantman  
Group, Inc.



Kathy Minnick,  
Controller,  
Affinis Corp.



Carmen  
Borgeson, CFO,  
Braun Intertec.

See CFOs, page 12

## TRANSACTIONS

**APEX BUYS: Apex Companies, LLC** (Rockville, MD), a 600-plus-person energy, water resources and environmental consulting and engineering firm, announced the acquisition of **Southwest Geoscience**.

The transaction closed on March 29.

A privately held firm headquartered in Dallas, Southwest Geoscience is an environmental consulting services company specializing in due diligence, site investigation, corrective action, industrial hygiene, multi-media compliance and permitting, and natural resources management. The company has offices located throughout Texas, as well as in Oklahoma and New Mexico.

Apex is a portfolio company of Tailwind Capital, a private equity firm focused on investing in growth-oriented middle market companies.

"The acquisition of Southwest Geoscience will enhance Apex's capability and capacity to serve existing and new clients, and drive growth in specific end markets such as oil and gas and real estate," said Peter Ceribelli, Apex CEO. "The company boasts a talented core of professionals who are well-established and highly-respected among their clients."

"Teaming with Apex will enable our combined staffs to offer current and potential clients expanded services across a broader geographic network," said Chris Mitchell, principal of Southwest Geoscience. "It is a mutually beneficial partnership and we are confident that the newly created synergies will lead to great opportunities in the regions and industries we share work in."

Apex was recently named a 2013 Top 100 Environmental Firm by Engineering News-Record Magazine. Placing at No. 77, this ranking is 22 spots higher than the company's previous ranking, and it's highest ever. Fueled by record sales, outstanding client retention and strategic acquisition, Apex was also named a Top 30 All-Environmental Firm (No. 20) for the first time.

**PARSONS BUYS DELCAN: Parsons** (Pasadena, CA) announced that it has acquired **Delcan** (La Palma, CA), a multidisciplinary engineering, planning, management, and technology firm that provides a broad range of integrated systems and infrastructure solutions to the transportation market.

Delcan is a strategic addition to Parsons and signals the firm's intent to expand its geographic footprint in transportation, one of the corporation's four key market areas.

"In addition to increasing our presence in Canada and other key strategic geographies in the world, the acquisition of Delcan continues the progression of our corporate objectives through the expansion of our transportation and infrastructure business lines and our suite of technology offerings," said Chuck Harrington, Parsons chairman and CEO.

Over its 60-year history, Delcan has been providing transportation solutions within the rail and transit, road and highway, structures, water, freight, and intelligent transportation systems (ITS) markets, developing a reputation for exceeding customer expectations. An acknowledged leader in ITS, Delcan will further strengthen Parsons' offerings in this area across all markets.

With revenues of approximately \$126 million in 2013, Delcan has 800 employees working from more than 25 locations across the globe, including the United States, the Middle East, and Hong Kong. Delcan's customers include all levels of government, regional network and transit operators, port authorities, and freight and logistics companies. With revenues of \$3 billion in 2013, Parsons is one of the largest transportation planning, engineering, and construction firms in the world, having successfully delivered 10,000-plus miles of roads and highways, 4,500-plus bridges, and 400-plus airports worldwide.

The corporation's extensive portfolio of diverse transportation projects includes rail and transit, road and highway, bridge and tunnel, and aviation infrastructure. Parsons' expertise encompasses all phases of transportation engineering operations, from the initial planning stage through final design, construction, commissioning, maintenance, and financing.

**PSI ACQUIRES: Professional Service Industries, Inc.** (Oakbrook Terrace, IL), an independent engineering and testing firm with approximately \$260 million in annual revenues, acquired **Midwest Engineering Services, Inc.** (Waukesha, WI), a full-service engineering testing, inspection and consulting firm with five locations in Wisconsin.

Founded in 1989, MES adds 40 staff and about \$4 million in revenue to PSI's family of companies. MES also has offices in Appleton, Chippewa Falls, Green Bay, and Ripon, all in Wis. Combined with PSI's existing operation in Pewaukee, Wis., this now creates the largest engineering, testing and inspection firm of its type in the state. MES will continue operations as **MES – A PSI Company**. This acquisition has closed and is effective March 31.

Dave Barndt has been promoted to senior vice president with responsibilities overseeing offices in Illinois, Wisconsin and Minnesota. Joining the PSI leadership team in Wisconsin from MES will be Matt Henderson and Jim Becco.

As vice president, Henderson will oversee all operations in Wisconsin and as district manager, Becco will oversee operations in the greater Milwaukee area.

PSI provides a wide range of environmental, engineering and testing services, including: environmental consulting, geotechnical engineering, construction materials testing and engineering, industrial hygiene services, facilities and roof consulting, NDE, and specialty engineering and testing services.

CFOs, from page 11

**DEPEND ON DELEGATION... SOMETIMES.** At **Braun Intertec** (Minneapolis, MN), a 600-plus-person professional multidisciplinary engineering firm, Carmen Borgeson, CFO, also enjoys the variety of her position.

"I like this type of constant change and get bored with routines," she says. "If something lands on my desk that is not within the normal scope of my duties, but is confidential and can't be delegated, I will handle the matter."

If it's not confidential, Borgeson says she does one of the following:

- "If there is another person more qualified to handle the item and I have little to no interest in it, I will delegate it."
- "If there is another person more qualified to handle the item, but I have interest in it and time to do it, I will take it on."
- "If there isn't another person capable of handling the item, I will either take it on myself, if I have time, or work with someone to handle the matter."

As with most job descriptions, the CFO's job description contains verbiage similar to "other duties as assigned." And in most cases, assorted tasks are met with aplomb. ▀▀