



Visitors to Zweig Group's new office building walk into a modern, open, bright space.

New office space

Some insights for those planning to relocate or revamp their digs, because we just went through the process.



Mark Zweig

EDITORIAL

We just moved into a new office space a couple weeks ago. It's a big step up from our old space – one that was cobbled together in a 1960s medical office building with an add-on hair salon – a virtual rabbit-warren of halls and level changes with doors on automatic closers and horrible HVAC and lighting. We now have 7,000-square-feet of nice open space with large walls of glass, minimal halls, nice bathrooms and kitchen, large conference room, and super efficient lighting and HVAC. Plus, we're on a major road with great signage – including a special clock with our logo on it made from our old friends at Electric Time Company in Medfield, Massachusetts.

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TRENDLINES

Firms' hiring success



Eighty-one percent of respondents to Zweig Group's 2015 Policies, Procedures and Benefits Survey of Architectural, Engineering, Planning & Environmental Consulting Firms cited **good work environment** as a reason for hiring successes.

Name recognition/reputation was the next most popular reason at 78 percent, followed by **interesting projects/unique work** at 64 percent, **competitive salaries** at 55 percent, **effective recruiting plan** at 33 percent, and **geographic location** at 23 percent. Percentages total more than 100 because respondents were asked to choose all answers that applied. — Vivian Cummings, research analyst assistant.

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June Jewell

GUEST SPEAKER

Hot topics at the 2015 Hot Firm Conference

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Clockwise from top: The outside of Zweig Group's new office; employees busy at work to the beat of Pandora One; offices along the main hallway face a wall of windows; MZ enjoying his new digs.



MARK ZWEIG, from page 1

The effect on everyone's mood was immediate: We all feel better and more energized by our new space and are moving to the beat of our central stereo system, hooked up to Pandora One. It helps productivity, morale, and our image.

If you are thinking about upgrading your office space, let me give you some advice – remember, we just went through the process, ourselves:

- 1) **Don't ask everyone for their opinions on everything.** I'm talking about who goes where, what colors to use on the walls, and whether your bathrooms need full-length mirrors. The more you do this, the less happy everyone will be. You can't please everyone. If you ask and don't follow their wishes, they can justify being upset with you.
- 2) **Give people plenty of natural light.** Natural light keeps you awake. People who are awake get more done than those who are sleeping (or sleepy).
- 3) **Have plenty of bathrooms.** And be sure a couple are in more private locations for those delicate moments when certain noises or smells that one might like to keep from everyone else are possibilities.
- 4) **Make it fun!** Why does everyone make their office so serious? Have some humorous art. Install some toys. Do something that no one expects. Make the space look like a fun place to work, and you'll attract employees and clients.
- 5) **Wire it up!** Plan for the future and the changing uses and locations of things. Investing in the cabling you'll need for communications and computing is essential when you have the walls and ceilings blown out.
- 6) **Consider acoustics.** Carpeting is a heckuva lot better sound-wise than polished concrete when it comes to floors. Consider acoustics in all the materials you pick.
- 7) **Make it easy to find.** Good exterior lighting, the biggest sign you can get, and more should all be part of the new office. You want everyone who drives by to know where you are. It's marketing, people!
- 8) **Keep the style eclectic.** Going overboard on one or another trendy interior design fad (and they aren't all modern – "craftsman," for example, has been really overdone) will only make your space look dated in the years to come. Mixing up styles in your furniture and art will keep the place looking fresh and less dated in the long run.

So what is your advice here? Email it to me, so all of our readers can learn from your experience, too! ▀

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BUSINESS NEWS

HAGERMAN F.D. UNVEILS 9/11 MEMORIAL In conjunction with the Hagerman Fire District, **H2M architects + engineers** (MELVILLE, NY) was honored to be present at the unveiling of the Hagerman Fire Department 9/11 memorial.

The memorial, which is located on the fire department's grounds, was unveiled at a dedication ceremony and service on September 11. It includes a 14-foot, seven-ton section of steel that was salvaged from the World Trade Center and secured from the New York City Port Authority in 2011.

"The memorial was a vision and a dream that has now become a reality of epic proportions," said Hagerman Fire Department Commissioner Carl Fargione. "It is a tribute to all those who were lost on that day, and a place for future generations to come reflect and

memorialize those who were lost."

"The 9/11 memorial developed by H2M is magnificent," said South Country Ambulance Company Chief Greg Miglino. "It captures the essence of what a memorial for that day should be, and it was a privilege to be at the unveiling."

On hand for the event were members of the Hagerman Fire Department and South Country Ambulance Corp., in addition to New York-area firefighters and their family members, local residents, and politicians. In attendance on behalf of H2M was Director of Architecture Joe Mottola, architect Patrick Stone, and Director of Marketing Lori Anne De Iulio Casdia. In addition to attending as the project's architects, Mottola and Stone also serve as volunteer firefighters for the Massapequa Fire

Department and have a strong connection to the memorial.

The project broke ground in May 2015 and consists of a decorative masonry monument with an integral water feature that holds the World Trade Center artifact. The water flows from behind the Artifact and splashes below it, creating a reflecting pool. The monument is surrounded by a decorative paver layout in the shape of a Maltese Cross, and includes the department's patch made out of pavers and a 30-foot flagpole centered in the cross. The site is accented by LED lighting throughout.

The memorial is dedicated to Andrew Desperito, who was a member of the Hagerman Fire Department, and all those who lost their lives on Sept. 11, 2001.

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on the call.

"You can work on a project for months, coordinating design and construction issues, and not even know what some of the team members look like. I think this trend could be detrimental over time, potentially fueling the 'commodity-based' perception of team members."

SURVEY SHOWS CFOS RELY ON SOCIAL MEDIA LESS, NOT MORE. Stauffer may be pleased to learn that he is not alone in his thinking. Relying on the tried and true is indeed still one of the best ways to build relationships and network in the field.

"Despite the convenience of email, McDonald advises professionals to avoid becoming too reliant on it and neglecting the human factor."

A recent survey of 2,200 CFOs by Robert Half Management Resources found that 50 percent of finance chiefs said they prefer using email to keep in touch with other professional colleagues. Twenty-five percent of those surveyed said they like to keep in touch with colleagues through networking events, meetings, and conferences. Surprisingly, social media came in a distant third, at 18 percent – a dramatic decrease from the 45 percent of CFOs who said online networking was their top choice in a similar survey three years ago.

"Email allows busy executives to easily stay in touch with contacts and quickly receive feedback on a question or business request," Paul McDonald, senior executive director for **Robert Half**, said in a written statement.

Despite the convenience of email, McDonald advises professionals to avoid becoming too reliant on it and neglecting the human factor.

"Exchanging ideas over lunch or attending a conference



with others in your industry is a more personal way to develop a rapport with colleagues," McDonald says. But he adds that executives shouldn't count out social media completely in a business capacity.

"Social media offers a vehicle for quickly widening one's reach and gaining exposure to a broader range of news and insights," he says.

The survey also asked CFOs: "What is the primary purpose of your professional networking activities?" Keeping up with industry trends was cited by 46 percent of respondents, followed by growing the business (37 percent). Three years ago, growing the business was cited by 60 percent of CFOs; keeping up with industry trends was second, at 20 percent.

BURNING TO BE BETTER. Peter Moore, president of **Chen Moore and Associates** (Fort Lauderdale, FL) – a 43-person civil engineering, environmental engineering, planning, landscape architecture, GIS, and construction observation service firm – says that what he's noticed more than anything has to do with a shift in topic at these events.

"More and more professional networking opportunities I am seeing tend to revolve around self-improvement," he says. "Between leadership classes and running clubs, the primary focus has to do with making yourself better and to be around others who are like-minded." ■

Good people to know

Industry executives share advice on the types of contacts A/E/P and environmental leaders should have in their networks.

By LIISA ANDREASSEN
Correspondent

Everyone needs a support group to turn to when times get tough: Who should A/E/P and environmental leaders include in their professional networks? Which relationships do you value most? Who do you call to toss around an idea and who do you hold close to your vest? Mentors? Colleagues? Competitors?

“I have people (in my network) I know dating back to grade school, who are involved either in the industry or the community.”

MIX IT UP. Peter Moore, president of **Chen Moore and Associates** (Fort Lauderdale, FL) – a 43-person civil engineering, environmental engineering, planning, landscape architecture, GIS, and construction observation service firm – says that he has a large and varied professional network.

“It starts with the fact that I still live in the same city in which I was born; I like the weather,” he says. “Because of that, I have people I know dating back to grade school, who are involved either in the industry or the community.”

Going through leadership training in various engineering organizations, such as ASCE and NSPE, has also given Moore a solid contact-list of competitors and clients. Being involved in leadership and community organizations has also led to new clients and relationships with community leaders.

“Here’s a great example,” he says. “I recently hosted an event for a milestone birthday at a happy hour at a local restaurant. At one point, I looked over to see a conversation between a local lobbyist I’m friends with and a high school friend who is active in the community. Knowing people at all levels and from multiple points in life definitely gives my network a leg-up on others when it comes to wide access.”

LOOK OUTSIDE THE INDUSTRY. Craig Stauffer, president of **PCS Structural Solutions** (Seattle, WA), a 40-person structural engineering firm, says that it’s important to understand the viewpoints of clients, colleagues, and competitors because they each have different perspectives on the same

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TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE NETWORKING

Whether you like it or not, networking is part of being a strong business leader. BusinessKnowHow.com offers some advice for making your business networking as effective as possible. Here are 10 tips to get you started:

- Remember that networking is about being genuine and authentic, building trust and relationships, and seeing how you can help others.
- Determine your goals for networking and pick groups that will help you reach those goals. Some groups focus more on learning, making contacts, and/or volunteering; others are strictly for making business connections.
- Visit all the groups that spark your interest. Notice the tone and attitude of the group. Do the people sound supportive of one another? Does the leadership appear competent? Many groups will allow you to visit two times before joining.
- Volunteer. This is a great way to stay visible and give back to groups that have helped you.
- Ask open-ended questions in networking conversations. Questions that can’t be answered with a simple yes or no opens up the discussion and shows others that you are interested.
- Become known as a resource for others. When you are known as a strong resource, people remember to turn to you for suggestions, ideas, names of other people, etc. This keeps you visible to them.
- To get referrals, you must have a clear understanding of what you do and why, for whom, and what makes your doing it special or different from others doing the same thing.
- Be able to articulate what you are looking for and how others can help you.
- Follow-up quickly and efficiently on referrals you are given. When people give you referrals, your actions are a reflection on them. Respect and honor that, and your referrals will grow.
- Call those you meet who might benefit from what you do and vice versa. Express that you enjoyed meeting them and ask if you could get together and share ideas.



SPOTLIGHT ON: Lead

OPINION

The engineer as leader

Most engineering professionals share common personality traits that present formidable strengths, predictable challenges when seeking to transition into executive positions.

I have had the privilege of spending the bulk of my professional career working with science, technology, and engineering companies. From aerospace to computer technology to engineering and construction, the key thing all of these organizations have in common is their reliance on the engineering discipline of their people to fuel the innovation, product/service design, and market growth for their respective firms.

Another thing these firms have in common is the challenge of identifying and developing the senior leadership talent required to carry the organization into the future. The question of whether engineers make good leaders is moot: Some of the best senior leaders – including many VPs, COOs, and CEOs – I’ve worked with were trained as engineers. Having said that, some of the worst also were engineers.

What makes the difference? I believe there are some specific development challenges for engineering professionals/managers in making a successful transition to senior leadership that should be a priority for firms wanting to grow world class leaders internally.

THE ENGINEERING PERSONALITY. We’ve all heard the old joke, “How do you tell the difference between an introverted and an extraverted engineer? The introvert looks at his own shoes when talking to you, and the extravert looks at your shoes when talking to you.” This may be exaggerated, but there are some common characteristics among people who choose engineering. At the risk of perpetuating stereotypes, we can draw some general observations about engineers:

- **They’re smart.** People who pursue physics, math, engineering, and computer science have been shown to score higher on standard measures of general intelligence.
- **They’re analytical.** People who pursue engineering and the physical sciences score at the top of most tests of academic aptitude (SAT, ACT, AGSC), especially in the spatial and analytical/math categories.
- **They’re introverted thinkers.** Based on the Myers-Briggs Type Inventory, introverts make up only 30 percent of the general population but 70 percent of the engineering population. Similarly, 70 percent of engineers prefer “thinking” over “feeling.”
- **They prefer working with “data/things.”** Engineers

predominate in the “investigative” and “realistic” career fields, according to the Holland Career Codes, representing a greater focus on working with “data and things” rather than with “people and relationships.”

- **They score lower in emotional intelligence.** In general, engineers score lower on measures of emotional intelligence – self awareness, self-regulation, empathy, social skills, etc. – than do people in other professional disciplines.

There are, of course, many other personality traits that significantly impact leadership effectiveness that have little or nothing to do with occupational differences. Of greater relevance to the development of future leaders in the science, technology, and engineering fields are the ingrained skills and behaviors that people in these fields bring to their leadership roles. These skills and behavior patterns, for which people have spent the better part of their careers being rewarded for, must be “unlearned” for people to move successfully into senior leadership roles. The leaders who can make this transition successfully will excel, and the ones who cannot will never reach their full potential as executives.

The table at right summarizes some of the dominant skills that engineers bring to a leadership position. These skills pose both clear strengths and potential blind spots for emerging engineering leaders:

TRANSITIONING FROM ENGINEER TO LEADER. Engineers bring tremendous strengths to a leadership role. However, strengths taken to an extreme can often become weaknesses. So, the challenge in developing future leaders lies not only in identifying emerging managers/professionals who demonstrate fundamental engineering management skills, but also identifying those who possess the motivation and potential to build on these strengths to become the strategic leaders of the future. This transition takes time and



Leadership

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SKILLS ENGINEERS BRING TO LEADERSHIP ROLES

Dominant Skills	Clear Strengths	Potential Blind Spots
Intelligence	Capacity for quickly processing information and coming to valid conclusions; handling complexity	Need to be right; tendency to ignore the ideas of others; intellectual arrogance and aloofness with others
Critical Thinking	Asking the hard questions; skepticism about new ideas; willingness to challenge others	All new ideas are wrong until proven right; challenging or questioning everything; hyper-critical with others
Analytical Discipline	Like working with complex problems and data; focus on important details; concentrate on a problems long periods of time	Over-reliance on data to make decisions; preoccupation with details; under-communicate their thought process to others by a factor of 10
Problem Solving	Drive for innovative solutions to difficult problems/challenges; always looking for better ways to do things; thinking "out of the box"	Tendency to over-engineer solutions; reluctance to make imperfect decisions; aversion to 80% solutions that can solve problems quickly
Risk Aversion	Focusing on "what can go wrong;" building in important safety factors; ensuring all risks are mitigated before taking action; avoiding disasters that may harm people	Unwillingness to take action on risky decisions; tendency to delay tough decisions without all the data; building too much redundancy into solutions with minimal benefit
Logical Thinking	Emphasis on defining repeatable processes for getting things done; laying out methodical plans for getting things done; organized	Preoccupation with "process" to the exclusion of results; difficulty with ambiguous situations; linear thinking in situations calling for intuition
Objectivity	Staying focused on the problem; keeping personal emotions out of business decisions; ability to handle stressful situations well	Lack of awareness of, or insensitivity to, the emotions of others; conflict avoidance; unwillingness to provide positive feedback to others

requires more than simply assigning people to larger projects and bigger teams as they progress in their careers. As Marshall Goldsmith stated in his book, *What Got You Here Won't Get You There*: "being an effective leader requires as much 'unlearning' of old skills and habits as it does building on the strengths that you already possess!"

The key transition challenges for emerging science, technology, and engineering leaders are:

From . . .	To . . .
Being a detailed analyst and problem solver	Being a strategist and decision maker
Being the "smartest engineer in the room" who is focused on being right	Being the best communicator in the room who is focused on getting the "smartest solution"
A skeptic who views most new ideas as being wrong until proven right	An optimist, who views new ideas as the catalyst for future growth and opportunity
Bringing a focused and in-depth approach to problems and situations – a "vertical" thinker	Bringing a broad and diverse perspective to business situations – a "horizontal" thinker
Avoiding mistakes and minimizing risk in the pursuit of perfection	Learning from mistakes and taking calculated risks in the pursuit of business growth
Creating the best technical solutions to a specific problem	Finding the best business solution that balances technical, client, and financial requirements
Taking personal pride in one's own technical and professional prowess	Taking personal pride in creating the best environment for innovation and business results

TAKE THE LEADERSHIP STEP. Given the challenges facing engineering professionals in making the transition to leadership, what are the key skills and capabilities required for aspiring executive leaders to be successful in today's world? Besides my own experience in working with some of the best engineering firms (and leaders) in the business, the answer may also lie in the work being done by professional organizations and leadership schools of engineering.

The common elements of these works is represented by my Leadership STEP framework, outlined below. This framework describes six key leadership roles that engineering professionals and managers must learn in order to be effective in taking on a senior leadership role.

- 1) Strategic Thinker.** Build on their skills in analysis, problem solving, and tactical planning to redirect their thinking to broad-spectrum industry knowledge and experience. Coach them in becoming comfortable with ambiguity, connecting the dots between seemingly unrelated information, and recognizing windows of opportunity for action. This requires new skills in conceptual/lateral thinking, risk taking, and the ability to transfer learning from one situation to another.
- 2) Business Architect.** Build on their skills in project management and delivery to explore innovative ways to deliver the firm's products and services to new clients, simplify and accelerate the delivery of products/services, and challenge conventional ways of getting the work done. Provide opportunities for these people to lead new business ventures with new clients and market areas. This requires an understanding of organizational design, entrepreneurship, and talent management focused on how to

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get the “right people” in the “right positions” doing the “right things.”

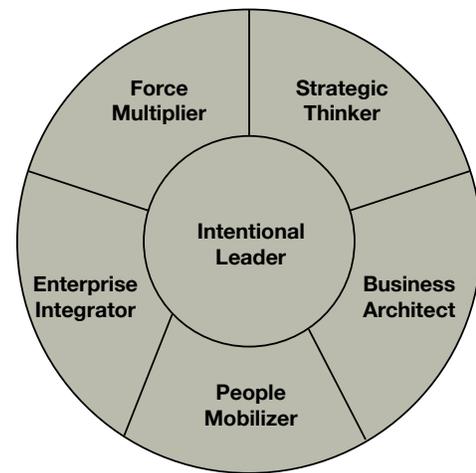
3) People Mobilizer. Build on their demonstrated ability to manage teams and deliver “fact-based” communication to be comfortable with leading “from the front” and communicating confidently about the future. Provide opportunities for visibility inside and outside the organization to inspire people, project personal power and confidence, and speak with personal conviction. This role requires the development of executive “presence,” comfort with visibility, effective individual/group communication skills, and the use of emotional intelligence skills in interacting with a diverse range of people inside and outside the organization.

4) Enterprise Integrator. Help potential managers shift from focusing on “my team, my clients, and my results” to assuming broader responsibility for working across traditional technical/functional boundaries, identifying and pursuing opportunities for client synergy and cross-selling, and overcoming the “silo mentality” that permeates most firms. Put them in the position of having to lead and integrate multiple, disparate teams to achieve results by leveraging technologies, clients, and staff. This requires skills in systems thinking, cross-functional collaboration, and overcoming resistance to new ways of thinking and acting in the business.

5) Force Multiplier. Build on the demonstrated strength in project management and tactical delivery that these emerging leaders possess to challenge them to become “force multipliers” for accelerating business results across the business. Put these people in the position of having to get results with a “team of teams” without formal authority to directly oversee or micromanage the work. This role requires higher level skills in managing competing priorities, making tough decisions, delegation, and establishing a culture of accountability in which expectations for performance are clearly understood.

6) Intentional Leader. The five leadership roles described in this article define the *what* of making a successful transition to executive leadership as a technical/engineering professional or manager. However, individuals with senior leadership potential must also be clear on *who* they are as individuals, *how* they define themselves as leaders, and *why* they believe others should follow them. The need to clear on one’s “intent” as a senior leader is the foundation for personal credibility and the willingness of people to trust. This insight requires self-examination about why you want to be a leader, recogni-

LEADERSHIP FOR SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY, AND ENGINEERING PROFESSIONALS – THE LEADERSHIP STEP



tion of the blind spots you bring to the job, and clarity on the core values that guide your decisions and actions. Providing the opportunity for self-examination through personal assessment and feedback, leadership coaching, and career mentoring is an important avenue for emerging leaders as they ready themselves for the challenges of the future.

CONCLUSIONS. The unique strengths that science, technology, and engineering professionals bring to a leadership role far outweigh the potential blind spots. However, the success of these individuals in moving from a project/program management role to take on a senior leadership position in their firms is tied to their ability to let go of many of the things that made them successful as “managers” and to adopt new ways of thinking and acting as “leaders.” With the accelerating pace of change in the AEC industry and the growing demands placed on the leaders of these firms, the need to accelerate the development of the next generation of leaders is clear. The Leadership STEP framework offers an evidence-based model for developing the key skills that will help these individuals become the industry leaders of the future. ▀

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issues. But even then, there’s still the risk of “group-think.”

“For this reason, I also try to expand my network to business professionals outside our industry,” he says. “I like to learn about how they approach internal issues, staff development, and business pursuits because it may be slightly, or even significantly, different than us. On the surface it may seem like their methods won’t work in our industry, but some aspects of their approach may actually be very beneficial. For instance, some of our key staff development tools are based on methods used by manufacturing companies. We just adjusted them to fit our company.” ▀

5 ADVANTAGES OF PROFESSIONAL NETWORKING



New contacts can lead to new business opportunities



New contacts can lead to new personal opportunities



New contacts can lead to new career opportunities



New contacts can help you identify best practices



New contacts can help you identify new business and industry trends

Source: TheThinkingSmallBusiness.com

BEST PRACTICES

Don't go it alone

Joining professional organizations can yield major benefits for recent graduates and seasoned industry veterans alike.

By LIISA ANDREASSEN
Correspondent

More meetings? More time? Really? Given the number of responsibilities that A/E/P and environmental professionals already juggle on a daily basis, joining a professional organization might not top your list. However, you could be missing out on key business-building strategies. Remember, there's strength in numbers.

Whether you join an industry-specific group, a special-focus organization, or a local chapter of a national trade organization, you'll make valuable contacts and gain information. Here are a few additional benefits suggested by Monster.com:

- **Exclusive online resources.** The websites of most professional associations have "members-only" sections that provide access to a variety of databases and message boards, so that you can be notified via email about upcoming events and special activities that may not be open to the general public.
- **Networking opportunities.** When you join a professional organization, you'll deepen existing business relationships and make new contacts on a regular basis. Such networking goes beyond the exchange of business cards – as you attend periodic meetings, become active on a committee, or take a prominent leadership role – you'll forge lasting ties with others who have common professional interests and similar business concerns.
- **Education.** Many professional associations offer their members the chance to update their knowledge of business and trade basics or acquire new skills through seminars, workshops, break-out sessions at conferences, and online courses.
- **Free or discounted publications.** Membership in many groups includes a free subscription to the organization's magazine. Some associations also offer their members free publications and discounts on CDs, journals, videos/DVDs, and other materials.
- **Conferences and seminars.** Members are often given priority registration for their organization's trade conference and may receive discounts on conference fees or special rates on related expenses, such as hotel reservations and car rentals.
- **Support systems.** Members of professional associations can often take advantage of formal coaching or mentoring relationships with more experienced business people who provide guidance and useful insights. Even on an informal basis, such relationships can be a source of answers and solutions when you're facing a challenging situation in your business. At the very least, the feeling that you have a support network behind you can boost your confidence when problems arise.
- **Political clout.** Large national organizations often have committees to track federal and state legislative developments that could have an impact on their specific business or industry. Such organizations have a significant political presence that far exceeds that of individual members. Joining this type of professional organization enables you to tap into the group's political influence and resources.

NETWORKING ROUND-UP

There are many associations and societies from which to choose; here are just a few ...

For architects:

- The American Institute of Architects: aia.org
- The National Organization of Minority Architects: noma.net
- Society of American Registered Architects: sara-national.org
- American Society of Landscape Architects: asla.org

For engineers:

- American Society of Civil Engineers: asce.org
- National Society of Professional Engineers: nspe.org
- American Association of Engineering Societies: aaes.org
- American Academy of Environmental Engineers and Scientists: aaees.org

And, of course, Zweig Group holds top industry conferences and seminars, too. Learn more about the Hot Firm and A/E Industry Awards Conference at zweiggroup.com/conference and about our upcoming continuing education opportunities at zweiggroup.com/education.

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PUBLICATIONS

WHO'S CHARGING WHAT, AND HOW DO THEY DECIDE? Zweig Group's *2015 Fee & Billing Survey of Architectural, Engineering, Planning, and Environmental Consulting Firms* confirms that there is a relentless march toward commoditization taking place within the A/E/P and environmental consulting industry. Among other indicators, the Survey finds that billing rates have dropped or remained flat in several positions from 2014 to 2015 – including posts such as senior architect, senior structural engineer and senior interior designer. Year-over-year billing rate drops never spell good news – firms want to command the highest fee possible and be reimbursed promptly for the work they perform.

The purpose of the annual *Fee & Billing Survey* is to gather, analyze, and publish information on the fee and billing practices of consulting engineering, architecture, planning, and environmental consulting firms. The 2015 *Survey* sample represents a diverse cross-section of 193 firms in the design and environmental consulting industry.

The process for the 2015 *Survey* began in March, with an online survey questionnaire that required participants to answer questions about their firms' billing rates, fee structures, staff chargeability, and billing practices. It was designed to be completed by the president, CEO, CFO, or person with the highest responsibility in the fee and billing division of the firm.

Today, triumphing over the competition requires more than an impressive list of similar projects and eloquent value proposition. Firms' fees now take a prominent position as deal makers – or breakers. In addition, cash-flow from billing is the fuel of the business engine. When that stream is cut off or constricted, the firm's financial health is compromised. Are some firms marching in that direction?

Zweig Group's 2015 *Fee & Billing Survey*, the 17th iteration of the

publication, raises questions about fee pressure. The information collected therein will help guide some of the most important decisions readers make on a weekly and even daily basis.

Data within the *Survey* reflects several shifts. For example:

- More firms are starting projects without a signed contract in place – leaving the firms vulnerable.
- Some results indicate good policies have been implemented – even if they are reactionary.
- To speed up accounts receivable, more firms now accept electronic payments, require project managers to assist in the collections effort, and charge interest on late payments.
- To get a fuller perspective, leadership is consulting the marketing staff when setting fees.

In addition to key benchmarks and statistics of best practices, the 2015 *Fee & Billing Survey* provides a comprehensive breakdown on the rate structures for the projects firms design and work on. Establishing professional fees and billing for the services rendered are significant and strategic activities of the business.

Anyone that touches estimates, proposals, and invoices should not just thumb through the *Survey*; they should read it thoroughly, bearing in mind the considerable influence this information could have on their firms' bottom line.

The 2015 *Fee & Billing Survey* will be released soon and is currently available at a special preorder rate at zweiggroup.com/surveys. Survey participants are also eligible for additional discounts on any Zweig Group publications. For more information, email info@zweiggroup.com.

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- **Civic leadership.** As an individual businessperson, you may not have the time or resources to sponsor a charitable event, partner with an educational institution, or otherwise participate in community activities. But if your professional organization is active in civic and philanthropic ventures, you can become involved in many worthwhile projects. Associations contribute to their communities in a variety of ways, from providing scholarships and hosting career days for students to supporting important charitable causes.
- **Recruiting.** Talent management and acquisition is a hot topic and building a talent pipeline is important. Joining an association can aid in your search.
- **Benefit your business.** Joining a professional organization is beneficial for your own professional development and the future of your business. The connections you'll make, the resources made available to you, and the ideas and advice you'll discover represent an outstanding return on what amounts to a modest, manageable investment of time, money, and effort. It could turn out to be one of the best things you could do for yourself and your business. ▀

GET READY TO START CONNECTING



Once you amp up your networking game, join more professional organizations, and meet new people, those contacts are going to seek you out on social media. One of the most popular platforms for digital networking is LinkedIn. Here are six easy ways to make sure your LinkedIn profile is at its best when your new connections start clicking:



Step 1: Make a good first impression. Don't forego the profile picture; doing so makes your profile 11 times less searchable, and therefore it's 11 times less likely that your contacts will find you. Your LinkedIn profile picture should be a simple, professional photograph – no selfies. Be sure to also update your contact information and include a headline with information about how you can help potential connections.



Step 2: Engage your connections with targeted updates. Post content to LinkedIn that you think will help your followers become more successful professionals, and you'll be more likely to convert them into loyal viewers.



Step 3: Tweak your summary. Your LinkedIn summary should be keyword rich and written in first-person. It should also include your main contact information and any relevant media links.



Step 4: Revamp your experience. Keep your experience section up-to-date – it's basically an online resume. You can also add media and links to your job description sections and showcase the recommendations you've received for particular positions.



Step 5: Include some projects you're proud of. Adding compelling projects to your profile can demonstrate experience relevant to your professional goals. Add links to show-off even more!



Step 6: Highlight your awards, skills, endorsements, and groups. There are literally millions of LinkedIn groups to choose from, making it an easy platform for online networking.

Source: FastCompany.com

Hot topics at the Hot Firm Conference

Though a plethora of issues were broached at Zweig Group's 2015 Hot Firm and A/E Industry Awards Conference, the main ones can be broken down to 4 categories.



June Jewell

GUEST SPEAKER

I attended my seventh consecutive Zweig Group Hot Firm and Industry Awards Conference this year at the beautiful Copley Plaza Hotel in Boston. This event, previously held as separate conferences, recognizes the Hottest Firms, the Best Firms to Work For, and Marketing Excellence in the A/E industry. This is one of my must-attend events each year, and my main reason for attending – besides presenting to and networking with the most successful A/E firm leaders in the industry – is to gain valuable insight that I can repurpose for my clients.

As usual, I met lots of great people – like Gary Dahms, CEO of **T&M Associates** in New Jersey; Ted Bumgardner, president of **Xpera Group** in Solana Beach, California; and Mike Fischer, senior vice president at **LHB** in Minneapolis. I always take lots of notes on the hottest topics at the conference and then do follow-up research, so that I can provide more solutions to the challenges faced by our clients.

I have consolidated the myriad of topics discussed into four primary subjects at the front-and-center of the A/E industry, and on the minds of leaders as they grow in this rapidly recovering market. Here they are, with a brief synopsis of the main issues:

■ **Finding and retaining talent.** The search for great talent is back, with many firms experiencing rapid growth. Many firms are finding they cannot staff as quickly as the work is coming in. This is the opposite problem of just five years ago, when most firms were hunkering down. Firms are finding creative ways to recruit and are leveraging professional recruiters with mixed results. I see more firms proactively turning to LinkedIn as a strategy, as well as hiring in-house recruiters, which seems to be having the best results.

In addition to finding the talent, firms are also concerned about losing the talent they have, with predatory competitors trying to steal their best people. Good project managers and technical staff are at a premium these days, causing salaries and bonuses to rise substantially. This phenomenon is also causing more firms to consider creative compensation and incentive plans, as well as improving their brands and reputations as great places to work. The firms that are winning that race, such as Bowers + Kubota out of Hawaii and Maser Consulting out of New Jersey, are finding innovative ways to improve their culture – by focusing on diversity, providing exciting career paths, work-life balance, and more.

■ **Increasing Profitability.** A quick poll of the conference audience by Christy Zweig found that “profitability” runs a close second to “finding talent” as the

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top concern of A/E executives. With rising salaries come profit margins that are being squeezed tighter than ever. A/E clients were trained during the recession to increase competition and commoditize design services. The firms that have avoided this trap are the ones focused on differentiating strategies, thought leadership, and branding to attract better clients.

Another approach to the problem of shrinking profit margins is improving business management and operations to increase efficiency and employee productivity. Many firms are looking at how they can improve individual employee performance, as well as transform their cultures to get employees focused on the company mission and goals. Performance management practices play a key part in the discussion around engaging employees in order to improve overall accountability.

■ **Employee development.** High on the list of strategies for differentiation and improving competitive advantage is training employees in a number of critical skill-sets. Many firms are employing creative new training methods such as online and in-house training coupled with coaching and mentoring to change mindset and behavior. Subject matter for this training includes business skills for project managers, sales training for seller-doers, and leadership training for emerging leaders. Most firms indicated that they were increasing their budgets for training in

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ON THE MOVE

BECKER EARNS WETLAND DELINEATION CERTIFICATION Mike Becker, engineering technician in **Wideth Smith Nolting's** Alexandria, Virginia, office, recently became a certified wetland delineator. Minnesota's certification program guarantees consistent implementation of the Wetland Conservation Act and other regulations. Wetland delineation is a distinct skill, and the voluntary program ensures delineations are conducted and reviewed by qualified people operating under a code of ethics. Becker's new wetland delineator certification will deepen WSN's wetland services credentials and ability to provide thorough and cost – effective wetland delineations. In addition to delineating wetlands, Becker's primary responsibilities at WSN include construction inspection and design.

SKELLY AND LOY PROMOTES CIVIL ENGINEER Francis Gally III has been promoted to the position of director of civil engineering at **Skelly and Loy** and will oversee staff, projects, and resources of the firm's Civil Engineering Services Group, providing engineering, design, and construction support services for municipal, water resources, acid rock drainage remediation, and land development projects.

"Frank's career reflects diverse project experience and a proven track

record for leading project teams that serve our clients well," said Gerry W. Longenecker, Skelly and Loy's vice president of engineering services. "This new leadership role will build on his ability to meet our clients' needs and contribute to our firm's continued success."

Gally has more than 17 years of public and private sector project engineering experience involving land development design and permitting, water resource permitting; mine permitting and reclamation; environmental regulatory compliance; and brownfields site assessment, remediation, and redevelopment.

He has participated in the preparation and permitting of site development plans for many commercial, residential and industrial construction projects and has experience in stormwater management, erosion and sediment control, and National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System water resource permitting. Gally is also experienced in design and construction permit application preparation for acid mine discharge treatment systems, as well as providing engineering assistance for mining permit applications.

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2015 and 2016, and saw this as an essential strategy for developing younger leaders, as well as improving overall financial results.

■ **Innovation.** Being on the leading edge of technology has not been the strategy for the majority of A/E firms in the U.S., however the firms growing the fastest and experiencing the highest profit margins are pushing the envelope with innovation. Langdon Morris gave a fascinating keynote about the role of innovation in today's business and says he sees it as an essential component to developing a successful organization.

The challenge with innovation is that it requires the discipline to step away from the day to day project challenges and focus on problem solving at a higher level. My experience has been that, while many A/E firms have innovated on individual projects, they've struggled with leveraging those products and services they developed across the rest of their clients and projects. Several design firms, such as WD Partners out of Columbus, Ohio, have added branding services to their traditional architectural design repertoire as a way to add value to their clients' growth strategies and provide a deeper level of support to their retail client base.

It is exciting to see the entire A/E industry growing and prospering again, and now the focus seems to be more on overall improvement and excellence. Employees are the primary focus, and they should be in a services-driven industry. Now our focus can turn to 2016, and I already can't wait to plan my attendance at next year's Zweig Group conference at the beautiful Biltmore in Scottsdale, Arizona. I look forward to reconnecting with the many winners of this year's awards, as well as seeing who will make it to the top of the list next year! ▀

JUNE JEWELL is the author of the book *Find the Lost Dollars: 6 Steps to Increase Profits in Architecture, Engineering and Environmental Firms*. She is the president of AEC Business Solutions. Connect with her on LinkedIn and learn more about how to improve your project management performance at AECBusiness.com

#HOTFIRM2015

Here are some photo highlights from Zweig Group's 2015 Hot Firm and A/E Industry Awards Conference in Boston. More pictures coming soon to zweiggroup.com/conference.

