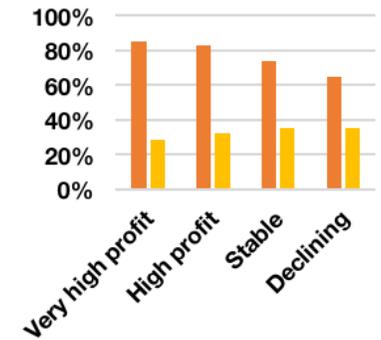


TRENDLINES

Assets & liabilities by profitability



Zweig Group recently released an updated version of its *2019 Financial Performance Benchmarking Tool* to include high performance firm statistics. This mid-year update incorporates additional firms with high to very high profit over the last three years in addition to the data from the *2019 Financial Performance Survey of AEC Firms*. Balance sheet staples such as **total current assets** and **total current liabilities** can be compared directly by profitability along with their sub-types and equity capital.

Participate in a survey and save \$320 on any Zweig Group research publication. Visit bit.ly/TZLsp to learn more.

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ElevateHer

There's more we can do to encourage women to remain in the AEC industry.

"100 percent. That's the number of women principals who have ever considered leaving the AEC industry. This number compares to 49 percent of men. I cannot get over this figure."



Jamie Claire Kiser

The concept of ElevateHer came to me at about 2 a.m. on a Friday morning, following a very late travel night on a Thursday. I drafted the email describing my vision for ElevateHer from 2 a.m. until 5 a.m. (the time I arbitrarily deem as appropriate to email colleagues, none of which have affirmed the appropriateness of this practice). Once the idea hit me, I was fully enthralled. I drafted and deleted the same email a dozen times before sending it to my business partners, Chad Clinehens and Christy Zweig Niehues. Once I hit send, I panicked. I checked my email every 10 seconds, waiting for validation that this is the time and this is the succinct statement of intention for ElevateHer.

The data came later. After the concept. When I decided that it was time for me to speak up, it was supported by instinct, not figures. After I meekly shared this idea with Christy and brought her and my colleague, Jaden Anderson, into the fold, they wisely did some research from Zweig Group's own data, and the results are crushing. I wish I could lead with the data, but that isn't true to the events (I have a history degree; these things matter). Here's what we learned within half an hour of re-distributing our survey responses based on gender:

- **100 percent.** That's the number of women principals who have ever considered leaving the AEC industry. This number compares to 49 percent of men. I cannot get over this figure. Every single woman in a principal role who

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Apple orchards and water rights

JAMIE CLAIRE KISER, from page 1

responded to our survey has considered leaving this industry. Every. Single. One.

■ **0 percent.** That's the number of women who were given any portion of their ownership for free. One in three men (33 percent) answered yes to this survey question. Not a single woman was seen as contributing enough to be awarded ownership, while one-third of men passed the test for an ownership gift.

After receiving this data, we set out to move from concept to execution of this platform. And that's when I panicked. Again. I have a hard time articulating my reservations about ElevateHer, but I think the most honest way to say it is that I have worked my entire career to be a respected professional, period. I have never been a member of a "women in business" organization; I passed up on the "ladies in law" groups, and I don't want to be divided from my peers based on the presence of ovaries. That isn't what I am about. I'm about closing deals and getting results. Hell, I didn't even join a sorority (they weren't exactly begging for my membership, either).

What I am about is using my visibility to counter the number one challenge identified by principals of Hot Firms: recruiting and retention. The talent shortage in this industry is real. Women are entering engineering and architectural programs at higher rates than ever, but they aren't staying. And the ones who stay and who grow into principal roles have thought really hard about leaving (every single one). We have to find a way to make this industry one that appeals to every bright mind. Women need to feel that they can have a meaningful career as engineers or designers or surveyors or CAD techs. To me, ensuring that those who enter this industry stay in this industry is tantamount to addressing this problem in real time.

"At a recent, small round table event that we hosted, I was the only female participant out of the group of 30 or so. I was introduced to a CEO of a firm, who, upon hearing my title, replied by saying that he just assumed I was attending as Mark Zweig's personal assistant."

My vision for ElevateHer is not one of divisiveness or "women first." It is a practical acknowledgement of the 100 percent of women who have considered exiting the AEC industry, confronting this challenge, and doing everything that we can to fix this system. We need women in our firms to speak up when they feel alienated. We need others who are advocates for women to be thoughtful in how they speak and to correct actions that undermine the career opportunities available for women.

The industry is incredibly busy. So busy that when we talk to firm leaders, we hear that they are reluctant to get rid of the under-performers because even the little they do helps. The solution to the talent gap is often buying a company or investing in recruiting. But as we are doing these things, we are not taking the opportunity to engage women and to encourage them to stay in this industry. Finding the next generation of women and employing them until they join the 100 percent ranks is an unacceptable, repetitive cycle. How do we break this cycle? We cannot afford to lose educated, trained staff. We have to become companies that truly support the careers of women if we want to build companies that appropriately reflect the communities we serve.

I can say all of this, I can cite statistics, but the truth is that I was not ready to bring ElevateHer to fruition without a strong measure of hand-wringing and introspection. There is something about a movement that is by definition exclusive that I find unfortunate. My profound sense of discomfort with ElevateHer centers on the lack of control inherent with launching any movement. I cannot control how people will interpret ElevateHer.

Back to that late Thursday night, though, is a story that evidences the cracks in the façade of the women in leadership roles in this industry. The "breaking point" moment for me that sparked an insomnia-fueled draft of the roughest framework

See JAMIE CLAIRE KISER, page 3



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THE **ZWEIG** LETTER

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JAMIE CLAIRE KISER, from page 2

for the ElevateHer concept was after a board member in a meeting interrupted me while I was in the middle of presenting a term sheet for an acquisition to tell me that his wife would just love my shoes.

This company had invested months of time, assembled a dozen of their leaders from across the country in a single room, and spent tens of thousands of dollars in preparation for that very moment – in finding the right company to acquire, in proceeding through negotiating and structuring this deal – and at that very moment, that precise instant of execution – my appearance distracted the room from hearing my ideas.

To make matters worse, this actually happened the same week that I invited a prospective client to meet up for dinner or drinks when I was passing through the city his firm is based in, and the invitation was declined because, as he said, he was married and that would be inappropriate.

On my flight back home the night after the meeting – the last flight out, scheduled to touch down at 11:50 p.m. on a Thursday, where I was the only woman in the business class area surrounded by suits and laptops – that sense of isolation crept over me and I started crying.

“If there’s something that needs to be said, a statistic that needs to be acknowledged, and a platform that needs to be launched, fear cannot be a preclusion.”

Granted, I am an easy crier; I’m on the verge of tears 60 percent of the time, but I couldn’t figure out why I was upset for a few minutes, until it hit me that I was simply exhausted by the constant reminders that I am not the same as the others in the room. As a negotiator, it took me out of the moment and disarmed me in a way that I truly couldn’t counter, and in a word, albeit a pouty one, it seemed “unfair” that my appearance is acceptable for discussion in the middle of a conversation about a multi-million dollar strategic investment. It is embarrassing to know that no matter how hard I work, no matter what I contribute to a company or to this industry, the conversation may still be interrupted by and overshadowed by a pair of Manolos. The deal I helped craft closed, by the way, and I didn’t once interrupt the gentleman who asked the question to inquire about the source of his pleated khakis.

I speak from experience when I say that the little things weigh down women in this industry over time. Another example: I received harsh blow-back from an email marketing campaign that I wrote in the first person for our succession planning round table event. The campaign centered on preparing incoming strategic leaders to “step into the shoes” of the outgoing leaders and featured a great pair of shoes that I – as the author of the piece – would merrily step into. I received an angry email from a man who found the image of heels to be salacious and the email to be full of innuendo (“you know full well you aren’t selling a seminar with this email”). He also told me – and I quote – “women in architecture and engineering firms don’t wear heels.”

When my colleagues and I are on-site with a client for the first time and I can find the opportune time to bring up my status on American Airlines (since you asked, I’m executive platinum), there is a follow up question that I can count on every time: “And how does your husband feel about all that travel?” I’ve yet to hear this question posed a single time to a single one of my male co-workers. Oddly enough, clients never ask me this question a second time after spending a day with me. I think everyone is united in appreciating my energy level in measured doses.

For a final example. At a recent, small round table event that we hosted, I was the only female participant out of the group of 30 or so. I was introduced to a CEO of a firm, who, upon hearing my title, replied by saying that he just assumed I was attending as Mark Zweig’s personal assistant. I informed him that I am woefully under-qualified for that role and laughed it off.

These things are not a big deal. None of them are. Not one. I certainly feel that I have been afforded the proverbial “seat at the table”; I have thick skin, and I love talking about shoes. The problem is that these examples make me keenly aware that I am different, and that difference makes me self-conscious. And when I am self-conscious, I can’t bring my best ideas to the table that I am told to “lean in” to.

But I was still reluctant to be the voice – perhaps the shoes? – of ElevateHer. It wasn’t until I sat down with Sepi Saidi and bared my genuine reservations about launching ElevateHer and threaded together all of these insignificant stories in a cohesive way that I gathered the thoughts behind this article. Sepi – a force to be reckoned with as a business leader and professional – has been through a hell of a lot more than I have to be accepted in this industry, but despite this, her response was simple: “If not you, who?” And she’s right. If there’s something that needs to be said, a statistic that needs to be acknowledged, and a platform that needs to be launched, fear cannot be a preclusion. I believe that my reservations underscore the reality of the situation – perhaps nothing is “wrong,” but we can work together to, in Arkansan speak, make things “more righter.”

ElevateHer will take energy and time from women who want to bring their best ideas to the table, and from men who want the best ideas out of their colleagues. This isn’t a “girl power” thing; I’m not a “girl boss” or a “she-FO”. This is something much more important and something that every person reading this has to join us to help implement. I believe the future of this industry will be indelibly changed if we are successful in this effort, and I hope that all of you join me and join the 100 percent of women who have considered leaving this industry in working toward a more sustainable future. ▀

JAMIE CLAIRE KISER is managing principal & CFO at Zweig Group. Contact her at jkiser@zweiggroup.com.

JAMIE CLAIRE KISER will participate on a panel entitled “ElevateHer | A Discussion of Gender in the AEC Industries” on Friday, August 2, at Build Business 2019 in Washington, D.C., hosted by the Society for Marketing Professional Services. Build Business is the premier business development, marketing, and management conference for design and building industry professionals. Join the conversation online at zweiggroup.com/about-us/elevateher/ or on the Facebook Group “ElevateHer | Women in the AEC Industry.”



Avoid commoditization

Learn from attorneys, business advisors, and other professional service providers on how to avoid commoditization in the AEC industry.



**Stephen
Lucy**

Firms struggle daily with the fact that much of the work in this industry is commodity-driven. While there is talk of specialization or differentiation, the reality is that the majority of work performed by typical design firms is not specialized and the related fees are subject to market pricing. Asking what the market will bear is the primary question instead of what the true value of your services is.

If asked how to avoid commoditization, typical responses for our industry are to specialize, differentiate, and diversify. These are all valid approaches and have worked well for many AEC firms. However, we should also look outside our industry to gain a broader perspective. We bemoan that attorneys, business advisors, and other professional service providers charge so much more than us, but we still pay their fees. Why is that and what can we learn from them?

- **Become a trusted advisor.** We are a service industry and the highest level of service you can provide is to become a trusted advisor to your clients. This transcends being an engineer or an architect as it means you are proactively helping your client achieve their goals and not just responding to

“Embrace generational changes, become more adaptive, reinvest in your firm, and be willing to challenge the status quo. A little change will do us all good.”

questions thrown your way. This requires actively stepping into that client’s space – leaning into it in order to actively try to change the environment. While we don’t control the environment, we can help to direct it.

You still have to deliver technical expertise, but you

See STEPHEN LUCY, page 5

BUSINESS NEWS

MANHARD CONSULTING OPENS NEW KATY, TEXAS OFFICE: FOURTH TEXAS OFFICE IS CLOSER TO KEY CLIENTS AND PROJECTS, STRENGTHENS PRESENCE IN AND COMMITMENT TO THE HOUSTON AREA National civil engineering and surveying firm **Manhard Consulting** has opened a new office in Katy, Texas.

The location will be home to Manhard's commercial site team, led by Senior Project Manager Guillo Machado, P.E., who manages industrial, office, multi-family, and mixed-used projects for the greater Houston area and beyond. The Katy office will also handle residential and land development, one of Manhard's core services nationally, for projects in the region.

"We're thrilled to have the workload and reach

in the Houston area and Texas to support this location. With a growing list of clients, partners, projects, and team members in Katy and the surrounding region, this new location will make it more convenient for everyone to connect," said Jon Unterreiner, region manager – Houston operations. "It also gives us better access to the talented workforce in the Katy area as we continue to grow locally and statewide."

The Katy location is the firm's fourth office since it established a presence in Texas, joining existing offices in The Woodlands, Dallas-Fort Worth, and San Antonio.

Manhard associates in the area or visiting from one of the firm's 10 other offices nationwide will be able to work from the Katy or Woodlands

offices, depending on their needs and the locations of the clients and projects they're working on.

Manhard Consulting is a full-service civil engineering and surveying firm that serves public and private clients nationwide. Our associates collaborate with your teams to address safety, functionality, and quality-of-life issues where it matters most: on your site, in the community, in everyday life.

With more than 250 employees, 11 offices across the United States and more than 10,000 clients, Manhard Consulting continues to lead the industry as one of the most responsive, innovative, and technologically advanced civil engineering and surveying firms in the country.

STEPHEN LUCY, from page 4

are also a problem-solver putting issues into context. Trust is gained over time as the client turns to you when they face a challenge requiring your expertise and perspective. It may also mean that you need to make a decision that is not in your personal best interest in the short-term to have bigger gains in the long-term.

- **Recognize market changes.** By abdicating some of our responsibilities and being slow adopters of technology, we have allowed others to take over some of our space. Manufacturers of specialized systems have stepped in to provide consulting as a "free" service to their customers as their costs can be hidden within the cost of their product. Granted, keeping up with the rapidly changing technology of some of these systems can be daunting, but your client needs unbiased professional advice which may not be forthcoming from the product producer. Our technical expertise has to evolve so we can remain relevant to the discussion.

"If asked how to avoid commoditization, typical responses for our industry are to specialize, differentiate, and diversify. These are all valid approaches and have worked well for many AEC firms. However, we should also look outside our industry to gain a broader perspective."

- **Capitalization to enhance growth.** The lack of available capital from either internal or external sources can be challenging. Most firms are self-funded, and the owners remove the profits from the firm instead of investing for the future. This immediate reward approach may block the type of innovation and investments in technology that lead to specialized capability.

As our industry margins may not be as appealing as newer markets, sources of external funding may also be limited. And we have to approach outside capital with a bit of apprehension as venture capital often comes with performance expectations that may not be achievable, and that may lead to a "bundle and sell" result a few years down the road.

Bottom line, we have to be willing to reinvest if we want to change our firms. After all, if you do not personally invest, why would new talent in your firm, much less some external investor, put their funds at risk?

- **Invent then deploy.** Many firms develop and deploy innovative solutions for their own use, but some are now creating entirely new businesses to provide those same innovations to the industry. We know our industry best so it only makes sense that we also understand how best to innovate our industry. We should not talk about the AEC industry as a "mature" industry as so many societal challenges must be addressed by us and will require innovation.

There is also increasing collaboration between academia and industry. Both sides recognize their symbiotic relationship in which neither can succeed without the other. This includes the industry pushing for improved curriculum and academia requiring industry input to shape and fund research with the ultimate mutual goal of attracting and retaining the best and brightest talent. Seek out and participate with the source of your future employees.

- **Look to the future.** Generational differences are evolving and how generations keep in touch and interact with their clients while still creating meaningful relationships differs considerably. My social media platform involves one-on-one facetime, not clicking "like" on LinkedIn, but social media apps are definitely less costly, more accessible, and do not add inches to your waistline.

Younger staff will also adopt and deploy technology more rapidly, and, given they do not have all the preconceived ideas of what is the norm, they tend to think outside the box on how to approach and address challenges. Let them be creative. There is risk with this approach, but our most dramatic and exciting changes in firm operations have been created when our young staff asked the question "why?"

There is no better way to avoid commoditization than to actively engage in our industry and with our clients. Embrace generational changes, become more adaptive, reinvest in your firm, and be willing to challenge the status quo. A little change will do us all good. ▀

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

PROFILE



Apple orchards and water rights

Taylor Dayton, EIT, is a project engineer at Aspect Consulting's office in Wenatchee, Washington.

By RICHARD MASSEY
Managing Editor

“My clients seem to value responsiveness above all other aspects of communication,” Dayton says. “Four years ago, I would have interpreted ‘responsiveness’ as having my phone on at all hours of the day, but I see nuance to it now. My clients value timely responses where I don’t come in swinging right off the bat with the ‘magic’ solution.”

A CONVERSATION WITH TAYLOR DAYTON.

The Zweig Letter: You started out as a biochemist at NASA. What did you learn from that experience that has been useful to you as a project engineer?

Taylor Dayton: From my first day on base, I was around women engineers of all ages, serving in a variety of roles – the head of my program office, the aeronautics project manager that stepped up as my mentor, the chemical engineer I shared an office with. As much as I knew there must be women engineers out there in the world, it was a very different experience witnessing them in action – solving very complex engineering problems, managing large technical

teams, and directing entire programs. I suddenly had a dozen role models that were like me in some way and actively encouraging me to get involved in the missions they were passionate about. Their enthusiasm was infectious, and they made sure there was a path available to anyone who wanted to jump onboard.

As a project manager, I want to grow into that role with my junior staff and with clients. It is easy in a technical field to hoard work and information because engineering problems grow in complexity very quickly. I am still learning but actively trying to be intentional about creating that space to share my enthusiasm for pumps and pipes and keep it accessible for anyone who wants to come along for the ride.

TZL: What has it been like going from a lab setting to working in the field, sometimes in remote areas accessible only by helicopter?

TD: Lab science left more room for trial and error. If my microbes died or I pressed down too hard and pipetted a reagent in the wrong volume, I could step away and come

back another day. Today, much of my fieldwork is remote – whether that’s in the mountains or far out in the desert. There is zero chance of a hardware store run in the middle of the day if I come up short on my equipment list. There is also no help coming if a bolt refuses to budge or you drop your only wrench into a deep lake. Those situations begin to ingrain a healthy, “This is what we have and this is the situation – get it done!” attitude. Six hours rotohammering into a cliffside to secure a stream level gage really puts my occasional reluctance to check my office voicemail into perspective!

TZL: You’ve worked on the \$82 million Icicle Basin project in North Central Washington. This is a high public-profile project with a large stakeholder group trying to collaborate and overcome varied water disputes. What have been some of the challenges and accomplishments you’ve experienced working on this project?

TD: The Icicle Basin project effort has many facets. I quickly learned that my role in large projects is to take ownership over a small portion of the project and support the overall mission to the best of my ability. Engineers love details and it was difficult to not get wrapped up in trying to track every effort that was going on simultaneously. There was a learning curve to accepting my role and making my piece of the technical puzzle fit with the greater team effort, but the end results have been greater than the sum of their parts. I’m really excited to see how our efforts might help solve a critical local issue.

TZL: As a consulting engineer, what’s the most important lesson you’ve learned about communicating with clients?

TD: My clients seem to value responsiveness above all other aspects of communication. Four years ago, I would have interpreted “responsiveness” as having my phone on at all hours of the day, but I see nuance to it now. My clients value timely responses where I don’t come in swinging right off the bat with the “magic” solution.

I am learning to make room for the client to talk and fully explain their circumstances, then present option-based advice instead of laser focusing on what I determine to be best alternative. There is a skill to structuring those options to help clients make an informed decision rapidly that I am still developing, but I find the better I do at clearly laying out the possible paths forward with their respective challenges delineated, the more satisfied the client is with the solution.

TZL: In 2015, you moved across the country from Virginia to Washington to work at Aspect. Any culture shock? What attracted you to the firm?

TD: The day after I applied, the associate engineer in Wenatchee called me directly to let me know what he was looking for in a staff-level coworker, described what Wenatchee was like to live in, and to get to know me to see if we would be a good fit working together. He had personally read my resume and cover letter – not a computer looking for keywords, not an HR manager in a different city with no knowledge of the day-to-day feel of the office I wanted to work in. There was no generic questionnaire asking what three things I would bring to a desert island. Aspect was the

first engineering firm I had applied to that used a direct-contact approach and that instantly shot them to the top of my list.

As far as culture shock, when you ask someone in Central Washington what they do, they rarely start off by describing their day job. They start with their family, their hobbies, and their outdoor pursuits. It’s dangerously easy to get invited into the world of white water rafting or Ultimate Frisbee or powder skiing and, before you know it, you have a shed full of gear and every weekend booked out. It’s very different than the status jockeying that dominates when you live and work near Washington, D.C.

“As much as I knew there must be women engineers out there in the world, it was a very different experience witnessing them in action ... I suddenly had a dozen role models that were like me in some way and actively encouraging me to get involved in the missions they were passionate about.”

TZL: You are a young engineer who has been with your firm for four years now. What made you decide to stay? Benefits? Work satisfaction/opportunity?

TD: I have been the oddball among the peers I graduated with by staying on with the first firm I joined. To tap an earlier question, I’m always looking for role models that are wired like me but are farther along in their career. In Virginia, the only path forward seemed to be the Washington, D.C. life of wearing suits to work and commuting two hours on the subway each day. It was refreshing to find associates and principals at Aspect succeeding just as well in life wearing blue jeans and kneeling in the dirt of an apple orchard. The reassurance that I can be me and succeed in this career outweighs the higher salaries available in bigger cities

TZL: You just became a project manager. That’s a work-horse position with tons of responsibility. What are you learning about yourself? What are you learning about the work and those you work with?

TD: This is the make it or break it time. The top down direction for project managers is to keep doing everything you’ve been doing at the junior level, but also get better at doing all of it, start learning delegation, make new client connections, step up in managing existing clients, scope larger projects, take more ownership over reviewing work product, and lean further into the technical specializations you want your career path to follow. Also, it’s not all about you and make sure you’re working on teams to keep your technical skill set growing, take on work from a variety of senior project managers, tag up with your peers who are also learning the project manager ropes, and bring junior staff up alongside you just like your last project manager did for you.

When you’re not a coffee drinker, you start wondering if there are enough hours in a work week to do all of those things. I try to keep in mind that it’s a marathon, not a

See APPLE ORCHARDS AND WATER RIGHTS, page 8

sprint (and I'm always on the hunt for a metaphor because I really don't enjoy running!). If the offer came tomorrow to skip this part of my career and move another notch up the ladder, I wouldn't want to take it. This is a great time to sort out a sustainable career/life balance and work out what management tools fit my style of leadership and help me meet my goals.

TZL: Early in your career, what project seemed to be the most daunting, and why? What did you learn by meeting the challenge?

TD: The first contract I brought in on my own was intimidating. I scoped the project with a tight budget and, at the end of the project, the client asked for some additional work. Completing that requested work would have pushed my project overbudget. I was surprised by how reluctant I felt asking for a contract change. In my mind, it was just a couple more hours of my time crunching numbers like I do every day and it was difficult to rectify that with the additional money I would have to ask for to cover that time.

Stressed about the contract change, I had a long heart-to-heart with my manager about standing behind and valuing my work and time. I've carried that forward to my role as a project manager. Developing pump specifications might feel like a casual afternoon activity, but many years of training and practice went into building that skill set and I need to put value on that.

TZL: Guitars and water rights legends. Tell us about your interesting hobbies when you are not working.

TD: Water Conservancy Board: Washington state water rights play a role in every water infrastructure project I work on. Right away, I was intrigued. Washington became a state in 1889 but didn't develop a surface water code until 1917. The state didn't regulate groundwater until 1945. There are hundreds of laws and court cases that interweave those three major milestones. Each court case is like a fairy tale or legend – someone tried to do something and someone else disagreed and some court made a very situation-specific ruling that we now need to extrapolate and apply to every similar case in perpetuity. That situation rides until someone else tries to do something that interacts with that extrapolation and the water code continues to evolve. It is awesome and one year into my job I decided I wanted even more of it.

Several counties in Washington state have Conservancy Boards. Conservancy Boards are volunteer boards of three to five members that can process change applications to water rights within their county and make a preliminary recommendation to the Department of Ecology. This helps Ecology manage a large backlog of change applications. There are some substantial training requirements and time commitments involved, but Conservancy Boards are a great way to stay plugged into water availability locally and to get a glimpse into Ecology's work process in regulating state water rights.



Taylor Dayton constructs and installs a lake staff gauge in the remote Alpine Lakes Wilderness region.

I must have skimmed the portion of the RCW describing Conservancy Board responsibilities because I was a little surprised when my commission letter thanked me for taking on a six-year term, but I am enjoying the experience. Now I am a small part of some of those legends and I get a front-row seat to many more.

Guitars: I can't hum my way through Happy Birthday without my voice cracking and I have never matched a pitch correctly on the first try in my life. I missed the phase of life where I might have found a rock legend to idolize. Somewhere along the line, though, I saw a band perform and there was moment where the bassist and guitarist exchanged a look and the whole tone of the music changed and evolved. All I could think of is, "How did they do that?" That kicked off a seven-year journey of faking my way through bass player auditions only knowing four notes on my fretboard, being the only adult in a six-month long guitar lesson series populated with hyper critical 9-year-olds, and a stint as the drummer for a band called "Run Fast, We Only Know 3 Songs" that exclusively performed at 5K run events.

My partner is a dedicated hobbyist woodworker and I'm full of ideas with very little of the patience required to sand a block of wood with 10 types of sandpaper. With his help, I love building guitars and restoring my weird pawn shop finds. I enjoy learning about the hobbyist builders who created the iconic guitars that have stuck around for 70 years. There are "vintage correct" paint finishes on some 1950s guitars that sell for tens of thousands of dollars, but when you dig into the story behind them, you'll find the builder was just looking to cut costs and grabbed a pallet of old paint leftover from unpopular car colors from the next door auto shop's garbage can. There's something great about that. ▀



Q&A WITH THE ZWEIG LETTER

Do you know someone who should be featured in *The Zweig Letter*? Contact Sara Parkman at sparkman@zweiggroup.com for the chance to highlight your firm.



Building your brand

Do you want to survive the next year, the next recession, and the ongoing reset of the workplace, the marketplace, and the recruiting space?



**Peter
Atherton**

To succeed in this new era, we need to attract top talent and clients. We need to be accessible and have a presence across multiple platforms. If we want to stand out, we also need to offer something different and better – something others want to be a part of and associated with. It is our brand that can help do this.

Building our ideal brand takes strategy, investment, and time.

Having a successful business and engaged employees are critical inputs, but ultimately it will be our culture, our connections, and our ability to transform and create impacts that positions us to win in ways others cannot.

CULTURE. Culture is a set of attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors – spoken or assumed – that guide our actions. Our culture eventually becomes our brand. This is especially true today with social media and our connected economy.

A positive culture of excellence, growth, diversity, inclusion, and encouragement takes work. Similar to organizational growth and profits, culture is an outcome – the result of a series of strategic inputs

“Between establishing culture, increasing connection, designing transformation, and inspiring impact, there’s a lot that goes into building an in-demand brand. Unfortunately, for that very reason many firms either won’t start or follow through.”

and activities and produced outputs over time, all of which can be tracked and measured.

Our ideal culture unites and helps protect and guide us. It serves as the “mortar” that solidifies our values, it holds us together and helps leverage

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ON THE MOVE

MEGHAN HOLLAN JOINS CR ARCHITECTURE + DESIGN AS VICE PRESIDENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES

CR architecture + design announced that Meghan Hollan has joined the firm as vice president of human resources. Hollan has led human resources at several local companies in a variety of industries, focusing on talent acquisition and leadership and organizational development.

As vice president of human resources at CR, Hollan will lead all aspects of human resources for the firm including best practices around talent acquisition, retention, development and training. She will also be responsible for all aspects of compensation and benefits

and play a key role in the evolution of the company's culture.

Hollan will be based out of the firm's Cincinnati headquarters and report to its President, Bill Dandy. "Our success is driven by the talent and innovation of our teams and their ability to serve our clients. Meghan's organizational development expertise will be key as we continue to positively cultivate our team, skills and culture," said Dandy.

Hollan is a dedicated HR professional with involvement in both local and national industry organizations. She is a Society for Human Resource Management Senior Certified

Professional, SHRM Ohio Conference Committee Chair and national SHRM and Greater Cincinnati HR Association member. She is also involved in local community endeavors, including being a past March of Dimes board member. Hollan is a graduate of Northern Kentucky University.

CR's clients engage with architecture, interior design, and MEP professionals across offices in Cincinnati, Dallas, Denver, Minneapolis, Seattle, and Washington, D.C. CR has developed a national portfolio of projects in the retail, hospitality, government, higher education, K-12, commercial, housing, and senior living markets.

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our different parts when stressed, and it connects us to a larger overall design and purpose.

As with business strategy and employee engagement, training, and development, leaders must be "all-in" on establishing and maintaining the right culture – the type our best talent and ideal clients want to invest in and be associated with every day.

"Having a successful business and engaged employees are critical inputs, but ultimately it will be our culture, our connections, and our ability to transform and create impacts that positions us to win in ways others cannot."

CONNECTION. We may have more "connections" today, but so many of us feel less "connected."

Our ability to form and maintain meaningful relationships at the office and beyond has been compromised – often in the name of production and efficiency. There is a widening gap between the connections and the experiences we want and those we have. The same is true for our best talent.

Designing our business process and talent development systems to increase connections in the following areas adds value, depth, and appeal to our brand. They can also be platforms to help share our message to establish and elevate our brand:

- At the office
- Within the industry
- Outside of the industry
- At home and in our community
- With ourselves

TRANSFORMATION. Transformation happens when we are changed in some way by an experience. It is the highest level on the evolutionary economic model.

In terms of building our brand and promoting loyalty and

retention, what are some ways to design and customize your employee and client experiences to guide positive change?

The following elements can be part of a transformation strategy:

- Coaching, mentoring, training, and employee resource groups
- Corporate impact and community service learning
- Solutions design
- Thought leadership

IMPACT. Impact is the difference we make in the world and in the lives of others.

Our desire for impact today extends across generations, demographics, and disciplines. Impact attracts, and as an industry we make an incredible impact every day. That is something we should be proud of and talk about much more than we do. But what about our impact on a firm level? What specific difference do we make? And how does that inspire those within and outside of our organization?

There are countless ways to do so, but the reality is that our impact on a firm level needs to extend beyond our projects to help us differentiate and build an in-demand brand. This impact needs to reach well beyond our business and into the heart of an inspired and active mission and vision.

Between establishing culture, increasing connection, designing transformation, and inspiring impact, there's a lot that goes into building an in-demand brand. Unfortunately, for that very reason many firms either won't start or follow through. This, however, presents an ideal opportunity for growth-oriented leaders and firms to stand out as they position themselves to win more through the challenges of today and the changes of tomorrow. ▀

PETER ATHERTON, P.E., is an AEC industry insider who has spent more than 20 years as a successful professional civil engineer, principal, major owner, and member of the board of directors for a high-achieving firm. Atherton is now president and founder of ActionsProve.LLC, author of *Reversing Burnout. How to Immediately Engage Top Talent and Grow! A Blueprint for Professionals and Business Owners*, and creator of the I.M.P.A.C.T. process. Atherton works with AEC firms to grow and advance their success through strategic planning implementation, executive coaching, performance-based employee engagement, and corporate impact design. Connect with him at pete@actionsprove.com.



Qualities of a leader

When identifying your next generation of leaders, there are some qualities you should look for, and some you should avoid.



**Naveen
Khammampati**

Whether you are the leader of an architectural firm or engineering firm or any firm for that matter, it's in your best interest to have a road map for future leaders. Every AEC firm will have to go through leadership transition at one stage or another. So, how do you identify these leaders and what are some of the qualities these leaders should have?

From my 16 years of experience working in the civil engineering industry and from the knowledge I've gained reading articles and books about leadership, I've identified the following qualities that set a great leader apart:

- **They think in terms of solutions to problems.** Leaders identify the underlying problem in any given situation and come up with a solution rather than complicating matters further.
- **They communicate effectively.** Effective communication is one of the top qualities of a leader. Clear instructions to team members are vital for the success of any project. A knowledgeable leader communicates effectively and provides clear instructions on how to get a job done.

“A good leader has sound subject knowledge, is a good mentor, respects others' opinions, motivates the team, does not micromanage, and shows consideration for others.”

- **They're proactive.** Leaders are proactive and take responsibility for their choices. On the other hand, reactive people take a passive stance.
- **They look for a win-win.** Leaders analyze the situation and provide options that are often beneficial to all parties involved. A leader is also a good negotiator.

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BUSINESS NEWS

INDIA'S UPCOMING CULTURAL POWERHOUSE SELECTS ICONIC ARCHITECT A world leading center for art got off to a flying start when Kiran Nadar, founder and chairperson of the Kiran Nadar Museum of Art, shared the stage at the Venice Biennale with David Adjaye OBE, to announce **Adjaye Associates** was selected, after a competition, to design the upcoming new state-of-the-art building in New Delhi NCR which will house the new museum and cultural center.

Billed as the leading privately-funded institution for the arts in India, the new Center will house a public museum of contemporary art and center for dance, music, and creative education.

Nadar has a passion for art and culture and has made it her mission to be an advocate for the arts in India and beyond. Beyond the art world, first and foremost Nadar is a professional bridge player, and has represented India on the International stage and brought home the bronze medal from the Asian Games last year.

"This Center will be a cultural powerhouse open to all, furthering our vision of making art accessible to everyone. It is rooted in the conviction that we need to make protected spaces for the life of the imagination. Just as literacy and education programs open minds, the arts and culture experience stimulates new ways of thinking," said Nadar. "David's design incorporates a series of thresholds to art and performance. It creates a cinematic experience for visitors, who encounter artworks and artists as they move from the street through the atrium and up through the building to the lush rooftop garden."

David Adjaye OBE is a Ghanaian-born British architect, whose most famous building is

the award-winning Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, D.C. In 2018, Adjaye chaired the Stirling Prize jury, Britain's highest award for excellence in architecture.

Adjaye Associates most recent completed buildings include a new contemporary art museum, Ruby City, in San Antonio, Texas for the Linda Pace Foundation and the Ghana Freedom Pavilion for the 2019 Venice Biennale.

"This is our first cultural commission in India but for me personally, it is the culmination of a much longer journey. I first came to India many years ago and immediately felt a profound connection with the life and energy," said Adjaye. "As a practice we are elated and honored to win this competition. The new building will celebrate and foster public interest in contemporary art, culture, and creative partnerships, and enable KNMA to continue their admirable pursuit of engaging younger audiences and future generations with one of the finest and most diverse collections of Indian Modern and contemporary art."

The global search to find an outstanding design team was led by competition specialists Malcolm Reading Consultants of the U.K. The competition was launched in the second half of 2018 when a long-list of 47 leading studios from 15 countries were invited to participate in the contest's first stage. At stage two, a shortlist of five practices was asked to create concept designs.

Adjaye Associates' "Veil of Triangles" concept is a reference to the sacred geometries of trees and mountains. It was selected for being both elegant and iconic. The jury praised it as "a visually and emotionally engaging building that was alive, dancing and timeless."

According to Malcolm Reading, competition director and jury chair, "The complex brief challenged teams in asking for a charismatic as well as an efficient building. The winning proposal is distinctive and intriguing but also underpinned with organisational logic and clarity: the galleries are skilfully handled, and the programmatic functions are clearly sited and dispersed."

The building unites two cores, a performance wing and an art wing, connected by a courtyard and a dramatic atrium of discovery. Nature and gardens are integral to the design, from the entrance courtyard, moving up through dynamic green spaces and terraces to the lush rooftop pavilion.

Adjaye Associates will partner with local architect **S. Ghosh & Associates**; engineers **WSP**; theater and acoustic design consultancy Charcoalblue; lighting designers Studio Fractal; and management support consultants Plan A.

The full jury comprised:

- Kiran Nadar, chair, Kiran Nadar Museum of Art
- Roshni Nadar Malhotra, executive director and CEO, HCL Enterprise
- Shikhar Malhotra, vice chairman, HCL Healthcare
- Malcolm Reading, competition director (jury chair)
- Glenn D Lowry, director, MoMA, New York
- Chris Dercon, art historian, curator, and former director, Tate Modern
- Scott Newman, partner, Cooper Robertson

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- **They value honesty and integrity.** Honesty and integrity are the most important qualities of a leader. A leader will gain the trust of others by doing what is right at any cost. Building trust takes time but being honest at all times can make this happen faster.
- **They're invested.** Leaders often have a long-term personal sense of investment in the company and its success.

In addition to what I described above, a good leader has sound subject knowledge, is a good mentor, respects others' opinions, motivates the team, does not micromanage, and shows consideration for others.

What leadership is not about:

- **Control.** It is a common misconception that leaders like to control everything. Instead, they understand that talented people do not need/like to be supervised closely. Leaders know that their team needs guidance and support rather than control. If you crave power, you may not be a good leader.
- **Overconfidence.** Being confident is one of the qualities of

"Honesty and integrity are the most important qualities of a leader. A leader will gain the trust of others by doing what is right at any cost. Building trust takes time but being honest at all times can make this happen faster."

a good leader but overconfidence can be dangerous and may lead to situations that he/she can't handle.

- **Breaking promises.** A good leader makes commitments he/she intends to keep but one who breaks promises constantly can't be a good leader.

If you want to be a good leader, understand and follow the qualities discussed here. And, if your firm is in search of the next leader, look for these qualities. ▀

NAVEEN KHAMMAMPATI, P.E., CFM is director of engineering at Greg Edwards Engineering Services, Inc. Contact him at naveen@gees.us.