

Using your time most productively

Principals and managers do meaningless stuff half the time. Three tips from Mark Zweig to get back to productivity.

If you – like most readers of this publication – are a principal or manager in an A/E or environmental firm, my guess is that less than a third, maybe half (at most), of your time is productive.



Mark
Zweig

EDITORIAL

If you think about whatever time you have to work in a given day as being represented by 100 percent, how much of it actually goes to productive work? By “productive” I will use a broad definition of either doing billable work or actually selling services.

If you – like most readers of this publication – are a principal or manager in an A/E or environmental firm, my guess is that less than a third, maybe half (at most), of your time is productive (based on my definition above). The rest of your time goes to a variety of firm management stuff – lots of long internal meetings where little is accomplished, talking to people about pointless stuff, reading and responding to internal emails, and a wide variety of other non-productive busywork and activities.

Of this wasted time, so much of it is internal firm management-related. I would classify at least half of the wasted time as such.

That may sound high to some of you but I can assure you it isn't. Now well into my 34th year of working for top management in A/E and environmental firms, the time I have seen wasted on internal management is staggering.

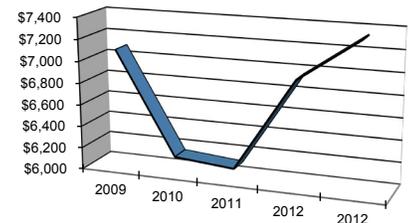
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TRENDLINES

Rising utility



ZweigWhite's 2013 Financial Performance Survey of Environmental Consulting Firms finds that the amount that environmental consulting firms pay for rent and utilities per employee has been on the rise in the last couple of years. According to the study, the median rent and utility cost per employee rose to a five-year high of \$7,338 this year. Last year, this number increased for the first time in recent years to \$6,954 from \$6,104 in 2011. On the decline from a high of \$7,096 in 2009, rent and utility cost per employee saw the biggest drop to \$6,152 in 2010.

– Margot Suydam, Survey Manager

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A/E BUSINESS NEWS

INFRASTRUCTURE CONCERNS: Americans believe that bridges, roads and energy systems are in dire need of upgrades across the U.S., a survey by business and technology consulting services provider Microdesk found.

The 2013 State of the Industry survey of over 2,000 U.S. adults age 18 and older, conducted online in August by Harris Interactive on behalf of Microdesk, asked questions regarding their sentiments on a wide range of issues, from what infrastructure is believed to be at greatest risk to how improvements should be facilitated. Following a year in which Americans witnessed the devastating impact of natural disasters, including Hurricane Sandy and infrastructure failures such as bridge and building collapses throughout the country, the survey revealed Americans are keenly aware of the country's failing infrastructure system.

As America's infrastructure system faces increased scrutiny, 41 percent of Americans believe that bridges will be most vulnerable to damage and decay; 26 percent believe that roads will be most vulnerable.

Asked to provide insight on what three types of infrastructure systems should receive government funding, sentiment again heavily leaned toward bridges and roads. The results of where funding should go include: Bridges (63 percent); roads (57 percent); energy systems (37 percent).

Americans rank major infrastructure failures as their greatest infrastructure-related concern (32 percent), followed by tax increases due to repairs needed (20 percent). Overwhelmingly, 93 percent of Americans feel that the government should play any primary role in helping guide U.S. infrastructure improvement.

"After a hard year in which Americans experienced the devastating effects of everything from hurricanes and tornados to bridge failures and train derailments, there is a strong awareness that our infrastructure system is in serious danger," said Michael DeLacey, president, Microdesk. "Our consumer survey shows that Americans are looking for a combination of government leadership and funding, along with new technologies, to get U.S. infrastructure back on its feet."

MARK ZWEIG, from page 1

So I now challenge you – as individuals – to do the following:

1) Resolve to rethink every meeting, every process, every form, and every approval necessary to work in your company today. Do you need to do all this "junk?" What could you cut from your day (if you were allowed to) that would free up more time for work and clients? The one thing I remember most about starting my own business more than 25 years ago was the incredible amount of time I suddenly had compared with my role as a high-level manager in a much larger company. Even though I suddenly had to do everything for myself as a one-man company, I still had much more time for real work than I had had in my previous work life. No bad meetings, no endless requests for information or reports, no chit-chatting with my peers and co-workers about internal organization stuff. Just time to work. It was nice.

2) Get fewer people involved in everything internal. Shrink the size of your board. Some smaller firms in this business automatically give all owners a seat on the BOD. That's crazy! Shrink

your operations committee. All principals do NOT necessarily need to have management roles. Don't give them out. Stop principals from free-form meddling in the affairs of everyone else in the firm. And while you are at it, reinforce the idea that any principal who is against something cannot veto it. Fewer people involved will actually IMPROVE the speed and quality of decision-making in many cases.

3) Remember why you chose the career you chose in the first place.

Are you finding all of the other things you do fulfilling? Or have you been careless with your time and blindly gone along with the culture of time-wasting and distraction that we all live in? You make the choices – and only you – about how you spend your time.

Can you imagine how strong, how creative, and how productive an A/E/P or environmental firm could be if everyone in the firm went back to doing work and interacting with clients versus wasting so much time inside on non-productive stuff? Do you think that would be a firm high achievers want to work in? I do! ▀▲

MARK ZWEIG is the chairman and CEO of ZweigWhite. Contact him with questions or comments at mzweig@zweigwhite.com.

RESILIENT CITIES: Former President Bill Clinton announced a global commitment to the 100 Resilient Cities Centennial Challenge during the opening plenary of the 2013 Clinton Global Initiative. The Commitment to Action, led by The Rockefeller Foundation named Architecture for Humanity as a partner as well as Swiss Re, the American Institute of Architects and Palantir. The program will support at least 100 cities to hire a chief resilience officer, create a resilience strategy, and provide access to tools, technical support, and resources for implementation, including access to innovative financing for infrastructure development. 100 Resilient Cities will also create a network for CROs to share information and best practices.

The commitment will be realized through a new 501(c)3 institution, 100 Resilient Cities – pioneered by The Rockefeller Foundation, will coordinate both the network of cities as well as the platform of services offered to network members. Swiss Re, Architecture for Humanity, the American Institute of Architects, and Palantir have made the first commitments for these services.

Architecture for Humanity has 15 years of expertise working in reconstruction and resiliency. Led by Eric Cesal, director of the Reconstruction and Resiliency Studio, the design non-profit has responded to 15 natural and man-made disasters, completed over 300 projects in 47 countries, and expanded to 63 chapters across the world.

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FORECASTING

Projecting firm performance

At many firms it is a deliberate process that involves many department heads and often results in comprehensive documents.

By LIISA SULLIVAN
Correspondent

Projecting a firm's performance can be tricky. How far ahead do you plan? Who participates in the process? Most firms agree that at least an annual review – at minimum – is needed.



Jessica Urso,
Marketing
Manager,
Cline Design
Associates, PA.

ANNUAL PLANNING. At **Cline Design Associates, PA** (Raleigh, NC), a 47-person architecture, planning, landscape architecture and interior design firm, Jessica Urso, marketing manager, looks six- to 12 months out for revenue projections, staffing needs and scheduling.

“All project managers and principals are involved in the process and topics discussed and addressed include project schedules, staff members needed and projected billings,” Urso says.

L'Acquis Consulting Engineers (Indianapolis, IN), a 35-person mechanical, electrical and civil engineering consulting practice, projects firm performance on a yearly basis, says Karen Courtney, director of business development.

“We are very dependent on knowing our work backlog, which has varied during the recent years from as much as 18 months out to as little as three



Karen Courtney,
BD Director,
L'Acquis
Consulting
Engineers.

months out,” she says. “We do this to set budgets for the year as well as to get a better idea of workload and staffing decisions. It also helps us to manage our business development efforts to make wise commitments of our resources – in pursuing and accepting work.”

At L'Acquis, the management team participates in this process. This group includes the president, COO, director of business development and three directors of the engineering disciplines: mechanical, electrical and civil. The firm also consults its controller beforehand to ascertain the earned revenues versus actual receipts.

“In order to predict future performance, we take inventory of past successes and analyze relationships, workload and overall market outlook for new and potential clients.”

“We evaluate the potential work by asking about the odds of acquiring it based on known intelligence about the pursuit,” Courtney says. “For existing work, we also evaluate the potential for additional services and consider if there have been changes since the last projections were done. Sometimes there are circumstances that will cause revenues to be delayed and we discuss those as well and, if needed, create a plan for cash flow management accordingly.”



Brian Curtin,
President, BRPH
Architects –
Engineers, Inc.

BD AND MARKETING GAUGE. Brian Curtin, president, **BRPH Architects – Engineers, Inc.** (Melbourne, FL), a 200-person international architecture, engineering design, and construction services firm, says that while the strategic plan sets business goals over a period of multiple years, the firm's annual Business Development and Marketing Plan is the official gauge by which it measures progress throughout the year.

“Initial plan development begins in September; an action plan is finalized in December; and the sales process begins in earnest in January,” he says. “Quarterly meetings occur throughout the year to monitor benchmarks and to make plan revisions, if necessary.”

The entire effort of projecting performance at BRPH is managed by the director of business development and marketing, Lindsay Diven, with each market sector lead responsible for identifying targeted opportunities and estimating potential value to projects. The firm's executive team plays a role by reviewing each part of the plan at a series of meetings during the formation of the plan and throughout the year. BRPH's board of directors' also provides oversight before the final plan goes into effect at the start of each year.

Curtin admits that, over the years, these plans have evolved from simply projecting sales for the year to a comprehensive marketing guidebook that includes topics such as “determining which trade shows we will attend, and what the latest market trends are, and breaking down competitor market share.”

See PERFORMANCE, page 4

GOOD TO KNOW

Median average yearly revenue growths necessary to achieve three-, five-, and 10-year projections are 6.6, 7.8, and 6.1 percent, respectively.

Source: Financial Performance Survey, ZweigWhite: www.zweigwhite.com/p-2155-financial-performance-survey-2013.

NEWS

Haiti orphanage named for Clinton

Facility is aiming for LEED Platinum and will follow sustainable and resilient construction model.

U.S. Green Building Council President, CEO and Founding Chair Rick Fedrizzi announced that their Clinton Global Initiative Commitment to Action, a LEED-registered orphanage and children's facility that USGBC will construct in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, will be officially named the William Jefferson Clinton Children's Center.

The facility, aiming for LEED Platinum, has been named in honor of President Clinton in recognition of CGI's longstanding work to engage and empower the global community to find innovative solutions to the world's most pervasive problems, as well as his efforts following the 2010 earthquake in Haiti to foster its reconstruction as a stronger nation.

"In 2011 at the Clinton Global Initiative Annual Meeting, USGBC and its partners made a commitment to creating a symbol of hope for Haiti's thousands of orphans and forge a model of green, sustainable, resilient building practices upon which to rebuild a nation," Fedrizzi said.

"Through their CGI commitment, the U.S. Green Building Council and their partners are helping to rebuild

Haiti to be stronger than ever before. This remarkable project will give many Haitian children a better chance to live their best life story, and I am deeply honored by this dedication," President Bill Clinton said.

In making the announcement, Fedrizzi was joined on stage by Gina and Lucien Duncan, executive director and general director, respectively, of Fondation Enfant Jesus, a non-denominational, non-governmental, apolitical charitable organization that operates three successful children's facilities in Haiti, including one destroyed in the January 2010 earthquake. The William Jefferson Clinton Children's Center will be constructed to replace the FEJ facility with a culturally relevant model of sustainable and resilient construction that will be replicable throughout the nation.

The Center was designed pro bono by an all-volunteer team at **HOK**, USGBC's official design partner, which integrated biomimicry to create a locally attuned and responsive building solution through which FEJ can meet the health and emotional needs of orphaned children and provide a safe and legal pathway to adoption. Upon completion, the William Jefferson Clinton Children's Center will house a health clinic, administrative offices for FEJ and a training center to educate local women on family planning, in addition to housing for 25-30 orphans at a time. ▀▀

PERFORMANCE, from page 3

"By identifying all of this information up front, it gives our supporting departments a chance to align goals and to be able to anticipate sales needs for the upcoming year," Curtin says.

DON'T FORGET TO LOOK BACK. Curtin says that some of the most critical information comes from historical analysis.

"In order to predict future performance, we take inventory of past successes and analyze relationships, work-

load and overall market outlook for new and potential clients," he says. "This helps to build the case for the level of pursuit we take with each prospect. We also review the state of the industry in our specialized, niche markets, including industrial manufacturing and aviation planning. Doing so allows us to set the strategy for our team of experts and ensures that BRPH remains in a prime position for winning work within these critical areas. ▀▀

RESOURCES

2013-2014 SUCCESSFUL FIRM SURVEY:

How do the most successful architecture, engineering, and environmental consulting firms do business? What are they doing that you're not? Find out with the 2013-2014 Successful Firm Survey of Architecture, Engineering, Planning & Environmental Consulting Firms. This new publication will tell you everything you need to know about how firms just like yours are growing and turning a profit.

The Successful Firm Survey is a compilation of all the major management topics covered in 10 of ZweigWhite's survey reports conducted throughout 2013. In addition to compiling survey data from other reports, we also broke data down by the overall sample compared to the fastest-growing firms and the most-profitable firms. Whether you're a firm president, CEO, vice president, principal, or division or department director or manager, you're going to want to see these survey results!

Topics covered include:

- **Financial performance:** How does your firm stand up to your competition? Get hard data on revenue per employee, profit margins, multipliers, average collection period, and more for the top firms in the industry.
- **Marketing:** How much do fast-growth and high-profit firms spend on marketing? What kind of hit rates do they get on their proposals? How do they use websites, newsletters, press releases, and other marketing tools?
- **Billing practices:** How much should you be charging for your employees' time? Compare fast-growth and high-profit firms' billing rates for every level of employee to your firm's rates.
- **Information technology:** IT can be a costly expense for many firms. But how much is really necessary to invest? Where's the boundary between investments that will improve productivity down the line and those that just break the bank?
- **Compensation:** Are you paying your top managers enough? Too much? Find out how much financial managers, HR directors, IT managers, marketing directors, project managers, branch office managers, and principals are earning in the most successful design and environmental firms.

For more information or to buy a copy, call 800-466-6275 or log on to www.zweigwhite.com/p-2176-successful-firm-survey-2013-2014.

AWARDS

Hot Firms don't settle for status quo

Leaders happy to see their efforts and successes recognized; vow to continue to impress.

Editor's note: Last of a multi-part series.

By LIISA SULLIVAN
Correspondent

Some of the most successful design firms in 2013 are not only celebrating growth, but also poised for further growth. That's the message from some of the winners in **THE ZWEIG LETTER** 2013 Hot Firm List – which celebrates the fastest-growing architecture, engineering, planning and environmental consulting firms in the U.S. and Canada. In this article, the leaders of some of these firms continue to react to their newfound status.



Chad Surprenant,
President and
CEO, I&S Group,
Inc.

I&S Group, Inc. (Mankato, MN), a 130-person architecture, engineering and design firm ranked No. 24. Chad Surprenant, president and CEO, says that it was pleased to see how high I&S ranked on the list. This ranking was confirmation on a job well done.

“Receiving the award is affirmation that our approach is not only in the best interests of our clients, but also results in a firm that is prepared and eager for growth.”

“Receiving the award is affirmation that our approach is not only in the best interests of our clients, but also results in a firm that is prepared and eager for growth,” Surprenant says.

2013 marks I&S Group's 40th year

in business, a date being celebrated through a series of marketing initiatives.

“Highlighting this award will be a nice addition to these efforts,” he says.

Surprenant also believes that using new technologies has helped I&S to serve its clients better and he is also seeing how technology has helped continue to maintain open communication between offices.



Ruth Brajevich,
CMO, Ware
Malcomb.

Ware Malcomb (Irvine, CA), a 200-person international architectural firm, ranked at No. 25. Ruth Brajevich, CMO, says that receiving this award demonstrates the growth and success that it has experienced as a company over the past few years – thanks to its clients, employees and industry partners.

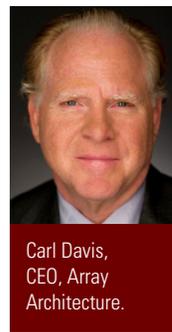
“Since receiving the award, we have promoted our win on all of our social media channels, along with sharing it in proposals, presentations and interviews,” she says.

Brajevich adds that the company's entrepreneurial leadership, long-term growth objectives, sound business practices and extraordinary team have all contributed to its success. Its geographic, client and product diversity have also helped sustain them through swings in the economy.

Array Architecture (King of Prussia, PA), a 102-person healthcare facilities design firm, came in at No. 27. Carl Davis, CEO, says that as always, when receiving accolades, he is pleased and humbled.

“The firms on ZweigWhite's Hot Firm List are an enviable bunch, and being in their company is a clear indication that my partners and our staff are doing many things right,” he says.

Array Architects plans to promote this success and recognition because it is



Carl Davis,
CEO, Array
Architecture.

proud of its achievements and has worked hard to become an award-winning enterprise.

“The ranking only solidifies what I already know about Array – we are among the best in what we do, we continually strive to do it better and we have assem-

bled some of the best healthcare talent in the country to provide our clients with exceptional service and value,” Davis says.

“The firms on ZweigWhite's Hot Firm List are an enviable bunch, and being in their company is a clear indication that my partners and our staff are doing many things right.”

Davis says that he would like to actually rename this award to “Hot Staff” award because he believes that each team member contributed significantly to the success of the firm.

Much like Surprenant at I&S Group, Davis believes that a large part of the firm's success can also be attributed to its adoption of and constant investment in technology.

“There is so much that a combination of bright people, appropriate technology and lean processes can achieve,” Davis says. “We strive to leverage all three in an effort to maximize the value we bring to our clients and their projects.”

Testengeer Incorporated (Port Lavaca, TX), a 275-person full-service engineering firm, is No. 30 on the list. Shane Dworaczyk, president and CEO, says that he knew Testengeer had done well for the last few years and it was very reassuring to see those achievements recognized.

See HOT FIRM, page 8

5 ways to increase accountability

It is important to get your entire team on board with why policies are needed and how they help the firm to be more profitable.

Holding employees accountable is an issue that has surfaced over and over again as I worked with A/E firms over the last 24 years. This issue goes so deep that many firm leaders will shy away from putting any policies in place for fear that they won't be able to get their employees to follow them. This practice often has the negative consequence of inconsistent quality control, and reduced project profitability.

Another very damaging and frustrating result of not enforcing company policies is the constant frustration felt by your managers and principals. When employees consistently show up for work late, don't submit their timesheets on time, or don't respond to client requests in a timely matter, this has a detrimental effect on every one of your employees.

This frustration flows down the organizational chart to the lowest levels, resulting in a decrease in confidence in the leadership of the firm, creating dissent among those employees who are behaving well and following the rules.

The following are five ways you can start improving your accountability effectiveness, and creating an environment in which employees feel responsible for complying with company policies. They need to understand better the negative repercussions that their behavior has on the success of the firm, and their colleagues. I will use the example of filling out timesheets and submitting them on time to tie these tips together, as this is one of the most prevalent issues that I hear about.

1) Expect leaders to follow the processes too. Employees are always watching their leaders for examples of how to behave. They rationalize their behavior against the standards set by the principals in the firm. If your principals don't fill out their timesheets, they won't see importance in them and feel justified in not taking the care to fill them out correctly or on time. Look at your own behavior to determine if you are sending the right message to your team.

2) Communicate the "why" of the policies. Believe it or not, many employees do not see the connection between their timesheet and their paycheck. Timesheets affect every aspect of your firm's success, from billing and payroll, to job cost, project management and cash flow. If timesheets are wrong, or are turned in late, it has a negative effect on every aspect of the business.

But don't assume your employees understand this. You need to educate them about why you have certain company policies. Many of your policies, such as how quickly you



June Jewell

GUEST
SPEAKER

expect your staff to return a client's call, are there because you have established values and criteria about your firm's quality of service and client's expectations. Don't assume your employees know why you have the policies you have. Consistent communication goes a long way toward seeing improved employee behaviors.

3) Set consequences. Sometimes employees need to be reprimanded for failure to comply with company policies. There's a need for clear and significant consequences for failure to do what is expected of them. Without these consequences, your compliant employees will become resentful of employees that are not dealt with. They will start to question why the policies exist in the first place and why management does not hold the offenders accountable. This is especially important if an employee's failure to comply is keeping others from getting their jobs done.

4) Monitor the status of performance regularly. There is a well-known saying, "That which is measured gets done." If you want your team to pay more attention to something, such as a key metric like employee utilization, or project profit margin, then you must focus on measuring and reporting it on a regular basis.

See JUNE JEWELL, page 8

When employees consistently show up for work late, don't submit their timesheets on time, or don't respond to client requests in a timely matter, this has a detrimental effect on every one of your employees.

A recruiter's credibility

The biggest complaint hiring managers have about recruiters:
They simply present too many unqualified candidates.

The challenges recruiters face today are numerous and varied, to be sure. Limited candidate pools, diminished hiring budgets and oppressive hiring legalities are just a few of the uncontrollable nuances that can stifle our effectiveness in a recruiting campaign. But some of our “wounds” are self-inflicted, aren’t they?

Sometimes we’re our own worst enemies because we don’t do the simple, fundamental things to make us successful. I want to address one fundamental issue that is particularly on my heart today: Complaints about hiring managers (for the record, I’m just as guilty as the next recruiter in this regard). Without fail almost every recruiter has at one time or another expressed a complaint that goes something like this: “The manager won’t give my candidates adequate consideration,” or “The manager is unresponsive to me in my attempts to schedule candidates.”

Any of those sound familiar to you? Of course, these are legitimate concerns, no doubt. But have you stopped to consider the hiring manager’s position. Why do you think they’re unresponsive to you? Why do think they let your candidates sit for days or haphazardly dismiss them after only a cursory review of their résumé? In my experience the answer to this question, in most cases, can be distilled to one word: CREDIBILITY. That’s right. They simply don’t have confidence in you as a viable recruiting resource. There’s no way to sugarcoat it. That, by the way, is why it’s so important to survey your hiring community occasionally for satisfaction rates. You may be very surprised by what you discover!

I’ll wager that if you were to poll your hiring community, their biggest complaint would be that recruiters simply present too many unqualified candidates. Consequently, it’s quite possible that they have developed a negative bias toward you as a viable resource to them. Poor candidate quality has put you in the proverbial “hole,” so to speak; one that is very difficult to emerge from because you’ve lost any credibility with them. Now, if you were to explore this concern further and ask hiring managers why all of your candidates seem to be unqualified, they would likely answer: “I don’t think you know how to appropriately evaluate candidates.” And if you asked them to explain this remark further, you would likely hear: “You’re not asking the candidate the right questions.” And if you asked them why that is, you would most certainly hear them say: “You just don’t understand the job we’re recruiting for. You don’t have a fundamental understanding of what this person needs to DO.”



Jeremy
Clarke

SEARCH
SAVVY

I can assure you that if you’ve developed that kind of legacy with your hiring community, you have a very long road ahead of you because most of your submissions are going straight to an email archive somewhere in his/her inbox. Here’s a very simple and very important principle: Candidate quality = Recruiter credibility. Because that’s true, the difficult truth is that managers who do not see you as a viable resource will work very hard to ignore you. Sure, they’ll still receive all your nice emails and weekly progress reports, but secretly (or perhaps not secretly) they’ve taken the issue into their own hands, and you’re just a distraction to deal with until they close the job with an offer to their own candidate. All the work – all the time spent on finding, screening and presenting candidates was completely nullified.

So, what do you do? How do you attempt to earn the hiring manager’s credibility again and at the same time insulate yourself from repeating this disaster? The solution is quite simple: 1) *Know* the job you’re recruiting for; 2) *Evaluate* candidates better by asking specific performance-based questions tied directly to the needs of the job; and finally, my favorite, 3) *Reject* any temptation to present marginal candidates.

1) Know. When I say know the job, I mean really know it. Before you ever begin your search, do

See JEREMY CLARKE, page 8

I’ll wager that if you were to poll your hiring community, their biggest complaint would be that recruiters simply present too many unqualified candidates.

JUNE JEWELL, from page 6

One practice that I have seen work very well for A/E firms is to review the key performance metrics for each PM during Monday morning meetings. Depending on what you want them to focus on, you can show a report or key metrics by department, manager, etc. up on a big screen, where it viewed by everyone. If your meetings are remote, you can show the weekly or monthly results on a web meeting.

I have found that if data is presented at regular meetings, staff are more likely to make sure the data is updated before the meeting. Calling out those who have not updated their budget, schedules, projections, etc. will spotlight the issues and let everyone know you are serious about monitoring their performance.

5) Make it easy for them. Your employees may have some good reasons for not following company policies. This is especially true if there are many “offenders.” I recommend interviewing employees to determine if everyone understands your policies, is trained on how to use your systems, and is able to easily accomplish what you are asking. This exercise can improve how you do things and enable you to remove bottlenecks to your employees getting their jobs done efficiently.

Not only will this help you to enforce your policies and see better business results, your employees will recognize that you are trying to improve the business – and not just putting policies in place to police them.

Enforcing company policies does not have to be a painful experience. If policies are truly important to the success of your firm, it is important to get your entire team on board with why policies are needed and how they help the firm to be more profitable. If you can’t justify your policies against this criteria, then maybe they really aren’t necessary at all! ▲▲

JUNE JEWELL is the President and CEO of Acuity Business Solutions, an award winning Deltek Premier Partner, focused on helping A/E firms and government contractors find opportunities, win business, deliver projects, and increase their profitability. Jewell will be a featured speaker at THE ZWEIG LETTER Hot Firm Conference Oct. 24 and 25 in Miami Beach, Fla. Read more tips for A/E firms at her blog at www.AcuityBusiness.com/blog.

JEREMY CLARKE, from page 7

your research! First and foremost, you need to have a good kick-off call with the hiring manager. Get them on the phone or in person and take 45 minutes to interrogate them – I mean it. Just grill them about the position. What specifically do they need this person to be able to do? What specific experiences need to be demonstrated in the background? After the kick-off call take two- to 3 hours and just research. Learn the trade, learn the associations, learn who the key players are, learn who the best firms are. Become an expert in a wee. That’s what you have to do!

2) Evaluate. You’re ready to begin assessing candidates. (It is important to note that the quality of your candidates will be directly proportionate to the quality of your interviewing skills.) As a recruiter, you’ve just got to do away with saccharine questions that only produce saccharine philosophical answers. Questions like: “Tell me, Sandy: What kind of management style do you prefer?” Really? That will get you absolutely nowhere. How about pulling a question directly from the kick-off call you had with the hiring manager? Something like this: “Sandy, one of the critical objectives of this position is that you develop an improved project management protocol for our studio. Can you give me a specific example of having been entrusted with a similar objective in the past? What was the specific situation? What was the specific action you took, and what the final measurable result?” See the difference? Which question do you think will help you to evaluate the relevance of the candidate better?

3) Reject. I tell my recruiters all the time, “Be sure that every candidate who makes it onto your hit-list deserves to be there.” In other words, don’t waste your time courting marginal candidates. Commit to identifying 20- to 30 individuals you know are some of the best the market has to offer and don’t allow anyone else to be populated on your short-list until you’ve fully vetted them. If you exercise this kind of scrutiny at the front end of your sourcing efforts and then deliver the kind of evaluation technique mentioned above, you’re sure to get good candidates. NOT many candidates, mind you, but very good ones. Your time and your credibility is simply too valuable to waste on shepherding only mediocre candidates. ▲▲

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HOT FIRM, from page 5



Shane Dworaczyk, President and CEO, Testengeer Incorporated.

“There was a great sense of satisfaction knowing we are doing well among other industry firms in terms of growth,” he says.

In the last three years, Testengeer has seen many changes while still staying true to the ethics and values carried from the time of its founding in 1979. Receiving this award was confirmation that they, as an organization, are working together to embrace change and to establish their presence as a leader of engineering and technical services along the Gulf Coast.

Dworaczyk says that they also use the award in marketing. Testengeer is currently updating company brochures, literature, presentations, social media, and website.

“We’ve also been listed in all of the local newspapers,” he says. “This is a huge accomplishment for us and something our employees are proud to be part of; we are sharing the news with our clients and the community.”

Thrasher Engineering, Inc. (Clarksburg, WV), a 309-person civil engineering, design and management firm, came in at No. 37. H. Wood “Woody,” president, says that he was pleasantly surprised to learn of their ranking – a testament of the vision of the firm’s partners and hardworking employees.

“This award gives us incentive to continue our growth in the mid-Atlantic region. It also provides assurance that we are having a positive impact on the economy in our service areas,” he says.

Woody believes that they are a hot firm because they continue to seek new opportunities on a daily basis and never settle for status quo. ▲▲

BEST FIRM

Barrish Pelham & Associates reaches the top

From the president to its administrative staff, engineers to bookkeepers – everyone works together to get the job done.

By LIISA SULLIVAN
Correspondent

Barrish Pelham & Associates, Inc. (Sacramento, CA), a firm of 15 employees, is evidence that constant improvement through feedback delivers results, as the firm took the No. 1 spot in the 2013 Best Firms To Work For ranking, structural engineering category.

The Best Firms ranking recognizes A/E/P and environmental consulting firms for their superior achievements in workplace practices, employee benefits, employee retention rates and much more.

With 68 years in business, BPA offers innovative, state-of-the-art solutions in structural systems and project delivery methods.

WHAT MAKES THEM TOPS? “In our opinion, we received this honor because we have continuously worked at becoming better. We listen to the feedback we have received from the staff through the ‘Best Firm’ surveys,” says Cata Jimenez, business developer. “When we found an area where some employees felt we were lacking, we worked hard to improve it. Even though we have undergone numerous changes, we never changed our culture of ‘Expertise, Integrity, and Service.’ BPA has been, and will continue to be, a family-atmosphere company where employees’ differences and unique talents are celebrated and where we encourage collaboration; we have designed our office to reflect that attitude.”

Cata, who has been with the firm for 10 years, adds that receiving this award reinforces the firm’s mission.

“Our employees take pride in their work, relationships inside and outside of the office, and the overall reputation of the firm. This award speaks of our employees and their dedication to BPA. Receiving the award will reaffirm these feelings and strengthen our firm culture for years to come,” she says.

STRUT YOUR STUFF. The Best Firm To Work For award is not only valuable when it comes to reinforcing employee morale and culture, but it also serves as an ideal marketing tool – it allows a firm to “strut its stuff.”

Lisa Esquivel, HR director, has been with BPA for 13 years. She says that, “The firm will be able to use this honor as a recruiting tool in many ways. By using the Best Firms’ logo on our website, company profile, and displaying our plaque in



Barrish Pelham & Associates, Inc. has only a little over a dozen employees, but that doesn't stop them from being the No. 1 Best Firm To Work For in the structural engineering category in 2013.

the reception area, we show how proud we are to work here.”

In fact, Esquivel says that BPA has received résumés from all over the U.S. where it's been stated in cover letters that the applicants have heard of BPA due to this award.

“Our current staff is the best and by being the best – we attract the best,” she says.

Matt Mlakar has worked with BPA for 12 years as an engineer. He says that, for him, there are two main reasons that he loves coming to work every day. They are:

- 1) The skilled, hardworking, and fun coworkers; and
- 2) The management's genuine concern for employees and their families.

“We get our work done, but have fun throughout the day by keeping the office atmosphere light. And the bosses understand that we don't live to work, but work to live. We're allowed flexible work schedules and I've never heard of any vacation request being denied. In addition, no one bats an eyelash if a son or daughter occasionally visits BPA for a few hours,” Mlakar says.

IT TAKES A VILLAGE... While management sets the tone for culture at BPA, it is the entire team that truly creates and contributes to the overall office's culture.

“The staff members are the ones who make the daily choices to assist each other, to perform beyond expectations, provide quality work products, and have fun while doing it,” says Jason Scanlan, also a structural engineer at the company for 12 years.

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ON THE MOVE

GREELEY AND HANSEN NAMES PRESIDENT: **John Robak** has been named president of **Greeley and Hansen** (Chicago, IL), a global civil and environmental engineering firm specializing in water, wastewater, and related infrastructure challenges.

In this newly created position, he will be responsible for all internal operations and business affairs of the firm and will also direct international business operations. Robak, 46, is a principal of the firm and will continue to serve as COO. He is also a member of the Greeley and Hansen board of directors.

“John has been appointed to this new position of president within our firm to add a stronger business-centric perspective within our solidly focused engineering and technical environment,” said Andy Richardson, chairman and CEO. “With his diverse prior international business experience, extensive people-focused capabilities, and broad, holistic business perspectives, John is highly qualified to help advance our strategic vision for sustainable growth, as well as our international footprint in targeted markets.”

Robak will lead the firm’s expansion and development efforts in the key international growth sectors of South America, Southern Africa and Western Asia.

“It’s both exciting and challenging to take on this new role at Greeley and Hansen as the firm continues to drive forward with a dynamic growth-oriented business model,” Robak said. “I’m particularly honored to serve as president of the firm as it heads into its 100th anniversary in 2014. I look forward to building on that long history of success by helping to drive high performance in our internal operations and to expand our business operations across the globe.”

PENNONI HIRES PRINCIPAL: **Pennoni Associates** (Philadelphia, PA), an engineering, design, and consulting firm, announced that **Donald Shanis** has joined the firm as a principal. Most recently the deputy executive director of the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission, Shanis has helped shape the transportation and regional planning process for the Greater Philadelphia-Camden-Trenton region for four decades.

“It is an honor to have a former director of one of the nation’s largest and most respected metropolitan planning organizations join our firm,” said John Zarsky, VP and Transportation Technology principal. “His vision will enhance the transportation services we provide to clients.”

Shanis’ broad professional responsibilities at DVRPC entail policy development, strategic planning, and management functions. Shanis was integrally involved with DVRPC’s core requirements of establishing a long-range plan for a diverse and complex region of more than five million residents, adopting a fiscally constrained Transportation Improvement Program of more than one billion dollars per year, and defining and successfully executing an annual work program of \$25 million involving more than 120 staff members. Shanis was instrumental in creating a dynamic work environment at DVRPC that breaks down unnecessary barriers and blends together transportation, land use, environmental, and economic considerations

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“By hiring the right people, our team’s culture improves beyond any culture that the management team could create on their own,” he adds.

A firm is an accumulation of many different factors. From the president to its administrative staff, engineers to bookkeepers – everyone works together to get the job done.

“We would like to thank our staff for voting BPA as the ‘Best

and fully utilizes state-of-the-art technologies and methodologies.

Shani has presented technical papers to the Transportation Research Board and testified before the United States Congress, and he is a frequent speaker and panel member on planning topics.

KS HIRES: KS Associates, Inc. (Elyria, OH), a civil engineering and land surveying firm, announced the appointment of **Mark Cencer** to the firm’s Coastal Engineering Group. The Group provides engineering solutions for all types of waterfront and water-related infrastructure, helping clients plan, design and manage the construction of projects along Lake Erie and the Lake Erie Watershed.

Cencer is a professional engineer licensed in Ohio and Florida. He has more than eight years of experience in marine engineering. He is responsible for all facets of KS coastal engineering projects, providing planning, surveying, design, cost estimating, permitting and construction-related services.

Cencer is an expert in erosion control and has authored more than 40 peer-reviewed technical documents providing recommendations for controlling erosion along 150 miles of Ohio’s Lake Erie Coast. Prior to joining KS Associates, he served as coastal engineer and Lake Erie Shore Erosion Management Plan coordinator for the Ohio Department of Natural Resources. In this role, Cencer primarily worked with property owners to ensure projects remained in compliance with state and federal laws, coordinating with U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency and U.S. Fish and Wildlife.

Cencer also has experience in designing coastal structures, including revetments, seawalls, bulkheads, breakwaters, piers, docks, boat ramps and beach enhancement projects. While at ODNR, he created many of the design examples for the Ohio Coastal Design Manual.

Cencer’s design expertise, insight into the permitting process, in-depth knowledge of legal issues and relationships with approving agencies help KS deliver economical and expeditious solutions to clients’ coastal engineering projects.

IVI HIRES VP: IVI International, Inc., an integrated construction risk management and due diligence services firm, announced that **George Wilson**, has joined IVI as a senior VP in its White Plains, New York headquarters.

“We are extremely pleased that George has chosen IVI for the next stage of his career,” said Robert Occhiogrossi, director of Technical Services.

With over 30 years of experience in design, technical staff management, expert court testimony, and building forensics, Wilson will focus his efforts on IVI’s transactional due diligence services on behalf of private and institutional equity firms. He has technically assessed real estate assets valued in excess of \$60 billion throughout the U.S., Caribbean, and Western Europe.

Wilson is a licensed architect in the States of New York and Connecticut. Prior to joining IVI, Wilson was VP and Northeast Regional manager of Marx Okubo, Inc.

Firm to Work For.’ It’s through their and their family’s dedication that we have been able to ride out the hard times and enjoy celebrating the good times,” says Jimenez, the business developer.

Steve Pelham, president, says that BPA has ranked in the top 10 for the previous six years. 2013 marks a breakthrough year, not just for the No. 1 rank but also in successfully overcoming the recession’s impact on architecture, engineering, and construction firms in the region. ▲▲

FORECASTING

Navigating the metrics maze

Times are still tight and firms are keeping a close eye on performance, taking the necessary action to keep profits in check.

By LIISA SULLIVAN
Correspondent

Financial metrics help you understand how you are standing up to the competition. Is efficiency up? Is spending down? What about utilization? These are all factors to consider when assessing the bottom line.

EFFICIENCY AND SPENDING. David DeLizza, senior vice president for strategic growth at **Pennoni Associates** (Philadelphia, PA), a 950-person engineering and consulting firm, defines efficiency as revenue factor, or net service revenue, per payroll dollar.

“Over the past year, this figure has remained constant,” DeLizza says.

Spending at Pennoni has increased in several areas – a trend the company expects will continue. As a result, it must constantly look for cost-saving measures firm-wide.

Larry LeMaster, CFO and principal, **HKS** (Dallas TX), a 963-person (866 domestic; 97 international) architecture and engineering firm, says overall efficiency has increased. The firm is producing more revenue with a lower headcount.

When asked about spending, he says that while overhead expenses are down, the average labor costs are up by about 12 percent per hour due to catching up base salaries of senior managers



David DeLizza,
Senior VP for
Strategic Growth,
Pennoni
Associates.

after several years of wage freezes.

PROFIT MARGINS AND COLLECTIONS.

DeLizza adds that Pennoni has been profitable every year since its founding in 1966. During the past year, overall profits have remained flat. Some markets are doing better, while other markets struggle with price competition.

Profits at HKS are also flat due to the increases in labor costs.

“Our average collection period is down (favorable) by about six percent. And, our utilization rate is up by four percent.”

Collection periods have stayed stable at Pennoni – on average, they range from 80 to 85 days. Utilization rate has slightly decreased over the last 12 months.

At HKS, average collection periods and utilization rates have both improved.

“Our average collection period is down (favorable) by about six percent,” LeMaster says. “And, our utilization rate is up by four percent.”

SEQUESTRATION AFFECTS METRICS.

Deborah Gill, director of business operations, **CLARK NEXSEN** (Norfolk, VA), a 500-plus-person architecture and engineering firm, says that since CLARK NEXSEN is in the govern-

MEASUREABLE MARKETING METRICS

Susan Arneson, vice president, director of marketing, **SmithGroupJJR** (Detroit, MI), an 800-person firm providing architectural, engineering and planning services, says the company has identified a number of key metrics that she tracks and uses as indicators of overall performance. In addition to the typical financial metrics, SmithGroupJJR also reviews a number of marketing-focused measurables to help them evaluate the following:

- What markets are growing? Which are declining?
- Which markets are we most successful in winning? Where are we not winning?
- How much does it cost us to win? Are we making good go/no go decisions?
- Which markets are most profitable? Which markets are not profitable?
- What are our local markets? What are our national markets?
- What is our market mix and what is the best mix for the long term health of SmithGroupJJR?
- Which markets are most likely to grow in the next one to three years?

ment sector, it’s been having a hard go at it for the past 18 months.



Deborah Gill,
Director of
Business
Operations,
CLARK NEXSEN.

“Sequestration and lack of movement on the government’s part has caused a lack of task orders being given, even when the contract award has already been made,” Gill says. “The end of the government’s fiscal year will

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GOOD TO KNOW

Net service revenue per total staff increased this year to a median of \$127,000. The overall median net service revenue per professional/technical staffer (\$154,928) increased this year.

Source: Financial Performance Survey, ZweigWhite: www.zweigwhite.com/p-2155-financial-performance-survey-2013.

FIRMS ON THE MOVE

ARMSTRONG EXPANDS: Armstrong Forensic Engineers (Tampa, FL), announced the expansion of its operations in Salt Lake City, Utah and introduced **Jay Przybyla**, senior consultant, as the newest member of the Utah team.

Armstrong is moving into newly constructed office space in American Fork, a Salt Lake City suburb, with testing facilities and additional office space for continued growth. Utah recently ranked No. 1 on Forbes' list of the "Best States for Business."

"We expect Salt Lake City to become the hub of our business expansion in the western United States," said Daniel Melcher, director of engineering. "We can now respond to accident scenes anywhere in the country within eight hours."

After three years in Armstrong's office in Chicago, Przybyla brings a rich background in accident reconstruction, civil engineering, and safety engineering. A published author and presenter in the field of transportation engineering, Przybyla is currently completing a doctoral degree from the University of Utah. Prior to his work in forensic engineering, Przybyla served as a state trooper for the Utah Highway Patrol, focusing on accident investigations.

"Jay Przybyla's background in law enforcement and his education and expertise in transportation engineering make him an incredibly valuable asset to our company," said Jeffrey Armstrong, company founder.

Armstrong Forensic Engineers is a national forensic services firm providing technical consulting to legal, insurance, and corporate

clients. The firm offers forensic engineering services and expert testimony related to mechanical, biomechanical, and civil-structural engineering failures and accidents. Rapid Response inspections are provided throughout the U.S. from offices located in Austin, Chicago, Detroit, Salt Lake City, and Tampa.

GEI EXPANDS OFFICE: GEI Consultants, Inc. (Woburn, MA), a geotechnical, environmental, water resources, and ecological science and engineering firm, announced the recent expansion of its Mount Laurel, N.J. office in staff, facility size, new client contracts, and expanded services. Additionally, **Barry Raus**, takes the helm as branch manager, while former branch manager **Christopher Dailey**, has been promoted to vice president of the firm.

GEI's Mount Laurel office recently expanded from 2,700 square feet to 5,400 square ft. to accommodate the doubling of its staff to 21 in the past three years. The Mount Laurel staff serves major utilities and energy, heavy and light industry, and transportation clients. The office received several multi-million dollar environmental site remediation contracts in 2012 and 2013. In addition, it has been awarded numerous contracts through the New Jersey Licensed Site Remediation Professional (LSRP) Program. Launched under the New Jersey Site Remediation Reform Act, the program allows LSRPs to assume direct responsibility for the oversight and closure of numerous types of environmental cleanups in the state, often expediting the completion of the work while meeting all regulatory guidelines. The office works closely with GEI's Montclair office on a number of these and other projects across New Jersey.

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soon be upon us, September 30, and we were told at a recent 'Megavention' talk in Hampton Roads by the Navy, Corps of Engineers, and Coast Guard that they are pushing all FY13 construction to FY14 and, therefore, there will not be a large contract award dump on September 30, as expected/hoped. There will still be some repair/maintenance work awarded, but not MILCON (military construction) projects."

This has forced CLARK NEXSEN to examine its efficiency and spending, leading to two reductions in workforce – mainly of people in market sectors (government) who were not performing. Additionally, CLARK NEXSEN merged with another firm, **Pearce Brinkley Cease + Lee** that works primarily in the education sector. As a result, efficiency is returning to profitable levels.

CLARK NEXSEN is also spending less.

"We are matching our expenses with our loss in revenue due to the government sequestration," Gill says. "For example, we had fewer summer interns, less convention attendance, and a reduction in charitable giving. As with any A/E firm, when you have labor and fringe expenses and two or three other big ticket items such as office rent and software enterprise licenses, discretionary spending is a very small portion. Most reduction in spending is accompanied by a reduction in work force."

Gill adds that profits are up slightly and that collection periods are about the same. Utilization is also up, but that is mainly due to the staff reduction. ▲▲

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BEST PRACTICES IN A/E/P PROJECT MANAGEMENT. This seminar provides a review of fundamentals like: roles and responsibilities; accounting; communication, and planning, executing, and closing out a project. Attendees will also learn how to manage things that derail even the best of us at times like: what to do when the PM quits; what to do when there is a bad PR event; how not to lose your shirt; how not to tick off clients; how not to create liabilities, and how to make more money. For more details about the project management program, click www.zweigwhite.com/seminars/pmo/.

To schedule a seminar at your firm, or for more information, please contact ZweigWhite at events@zweigwhite.com or call 508-318-5513.