THE ZWEIG LETTER

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HR | FINANCE SUPPLEMENTS

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Report from the 2013 Inc. 500|5000

ZweigWhite is back on the list.
Mark Zweig brings the highlights from the event.

That spirit of overcoming obstacles was apparent in many of the people we met at the conference this year.

Mark Zweig

EDITORIAL

We just got back from the 2013 Inc. 500|5000 Conference, held in Washington, D.C. last week. If you never had a chance to attend one of these events, I highly recommend it. Bringing the leaders from 5000 rapidly growing, privately held, wildly different entrepreneurial ventures together in one place is something else! And this is the ONLY event like it that I am aware of.

It was great to be back at one of these events. ZweigWhite was on the list twice before (when the list contained only 500 firms) in the mid-1990s. Shortly after we sold our firm to a private equity group and they merged us with a media and trade show company they had previously acquired, things began to go downhill. I retired to Northwest Arkansas, where I began my second, third and fourth careers as a college professor, developer and contractor. By 2009, ZweigWhite Information Services (its legal identity at the time) was defunct. It was taken over by its lenders and a new company was formed: ZweigWhite, LLC. At that time the firm had shrunken dramatically, was unprofitable, and had debt approaching two-and-a-half times the firm's annual revenue. It was crazy!

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BACK ON THE INC. 500|5000

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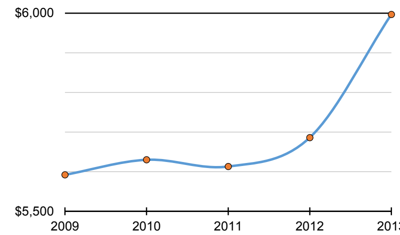
TRENDLINES

Group expense



According to ZweigWhite's 2013-14 Operating Expenses Survey, group insurance costs per employee increased significantly this year to a five-year high of $5,997. With the continuing rise in healthcare costs, it is no surprise that this number has been on a gradual but steady climb from a low of $5,592 in 2009. Rising to $5,630 in 2010, this ratio dropped slightly to $5,613 in 2011, only to increase again in 2012 to $5,686.
– *Margot Suydam, Survey Manager*

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A/E BUSINESS NEWS

GREENEST SCHOOLS: The World Green Building Council Annual Congress, the Center for Green Schools at the U.S. Green Building Council officially announced the 2013 Greenest Schools on Earth. The recipient schools were Sing Yin Secondary School in Hong Kong, China, and the Uaso Nyiro Primary School in Laikipia, Kenya. The announcement was made by the Global Coalition for Green Schools, a newly formed initiative of the Center, in partnership with WGBC. The two winning schools were awarded $5,000 each to put toward a new or ongoing sustainability project.

"When we sat down to review this year's submissions, we felt that we had two schools whose environmental efforts, though very different, were extraordinary in both execution and achievement," said Rick Fedrizzi, president, CEO and founding chair, USGBC.

The Sing Yin Secondary School, which largely serves low-income students, boasts an organic farm, two green roofs, a bamboo corner and an aquarium. Most classrooms are equipped with thin-film solar panels or sun-shading devices, advanced LED lighting, light sensors, motion sensors and more. The school recruits about 100 students every year to serve as environmental monitors, prefects and ambassadors. Within the community, they organized a 'Green School, Green Family' campaign last year in which students and their families had to conduct energy saving activities to save household electricity.

The Uaso Nyiro Primary School's unique Waterbank School Building, conceived and designed by PITCHAfrica and built in partnership with the Zeitz Foundation, is an alternative low cost school designed for poor regions in need of water. The school, built from local materials with local labor for the same cost as a conventional linear school, stores and filters clean water for the children year round, provides protected gardens for growing fresh vegetables and includes a community workshop and courtyard theater for school community gatherings and environmental theater. The school serves a disadvantaged community with 25 percent living on less than $1.25/day. Since opening, school attendance has risen from 70 to 90 percent and instances of waterborne disease have dropped to zero.

To learn more about the Greenest School on Earth and the Center's international efforts, please visit centerforgreenschools.org/greenestschool.

MARK ZWEIG, from page 1

The lenders recruited me back in 2010 and together with a few loyal, dedicated employees who were here – and a few I rehired as well as some new ones, and some great clients – we turned this thing around. We got profitable in 2011, bought our media group back, paid down on our debts, refinanced the whole thing in 2012, and bought out the former owners and the lender as well. In 2013 we added two new principals besides myself – both experienced design and business professionals with successful backgrounds in our business. Finally, in 2013, with a vastly reduced debt and a renewed sense of purpose and possibility, we got back on the Inc. 500|5000. We're now the seventh-fastest growing private company in the State of Arkansas.

That spirit of overcoming obstacles was apparent in many of the people we met at the conference this year. One company founder stopped at a tryout for American Gladiator on the way to her wedding and ended up winning the season and launching a new gladiator-style training business afterward. There were many others with similar tales. A huge majority of firms on the list (about 90 percent, if I recall correctly) were started with less than $10,000.

The combined output of the Inc. 5000 private companies in 2013 was greater than that of the nation of Ireland. The largest firm there had sales over $1 billion. Industries represented were everything from the esoteric to the mundane.

Speakers included Jack Stack, a guy who bought the engine rebuilding plant where he worked in the early '80s, when it was a $16 million annual revenue operation, and has since turned it into a $550-plus million group of 31 companies. He based his success on open book management – sharing the numbers with all of his employees and teaching them all about how the business makes or loses money.

We also had a lengthy session from Jim Collins, author of "Good to Great" and "Built to Last," among others, that would've made most any management book junkie happy with all the mentions of "Level 5 leadership," "hedgehogs," and "getting the right people on the bus." I found it one of the least entertaining and informative but I'm sure Inc. paid dearly to get him there as a speaker.

Of course, the best thing about the Inc. Conference wasn't the food, or the setting at the Gaylord National Resort and Convention Center (a good place to be during three days of bad weather), or the speakers. It was the other attendees. An irreverent bunch if there ever was one. I heard almost no banter about politics or the budget crisis, saw very few suits, and had some stimulating conversations with folks who clearly didn't feel bound by convention. That's what it's all about for me!

When you read this, I'll be in Miami with my entire family at our own high-growth A/E/P and environmental firm event: **THE ZWEIG LETTER** Hot Firm Conference and Awards Celebration. If it's not too late, come see me. Hop on a plane – it will be worth it!

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THE ZWEIG LETTER

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INTELLIGENCE

The true value of client surveys

When to do them, what to ask, and how to respond to findings.

By LIISA SULLIVAN
Correspondent

Client surveys give your firm the opportunity to ask clients what that terrific experience looks like to them – each of them. It also gives you the chance to show that your firm is serious about their satisfaction and to build stronger relationships.

> "It's better to have deep, insightful commentary from a smaller group – say 30 or 40 people – than to collect bland data from 200 people through an impersonal, rigid quantitative survey."

Jerome Guerra, marketing and strategic business development manager for **Fay Spofford & Thorndike** (Burlington, MA), a 275-person multidiscipline engineering, planning and environmental consulting firm, believes that a direct-contact client survey (e.g., phone, person-to-person, email) is an incredibly worthwhile and cost-effective tool for finding out where your firm stands in the business universe.

Gerra, a former principal at ZweigWhite, suggests doing a client survey:

- If you are contemplating adding a new service or entering a new market.
- If you are seeing erosion in the percentage of work in a certain market or service area.
- Anytime you want to gain some insight into how your clients and prospective clients see you.
- After a deliverable event such as a project progress meeting, 30 percent design submittal, etc. (ongoing survey).

Sally Orcutt, director of marketing for Client Feedback Tool, a piece of software conceived and developed by **Phillips Architecture PA** (Raleigh, NC) to assist designers to monitor their clients' perceptions of how each project is progressing, says that the intent of doing client surveys on an ongoing basis is to give firms the opportunity to make sure their project processes are working well for each individual client.

Sally Orcutt, Director of Marketing, Client Feedback Tool.

"Historically, many firms do a client satisfaction survey at the end of the project," she says. "The challenge with this approach is that the conversations A/E firms have with their clients during the project are typically project-specific. They are not asking if the process is working for them. For example, if the project manager is emailing the client and the client would really prefer to have a phone call – this is not likely to come up in conversation. And, while it may not be a real 'problem,' it can be one of those things that the client continues to be aware of during the project."

SEND IT TO WHOM? Guerra says that deciding whom to send the survey to often depends on the primary reason for doing the survey. If it's focused on breaking into a new market, the sample is going to be different than if the goal is to get an overall sense of how clients and prospects perceive the firm.

"When I did client surveys for ZweigWhite for a general perception survey, I recommended that they included some percentage of clients who they believed were very satisfied with the firm's work, some they thought might be unhappy with a project or personnel, former clients, and a number of prospective clients that they thought would be pleased to be brought into the fold," he says.

Orcutt advises that each survey should consist of questions that give the client the ability to provide feedback on the firm's responsiveness, helpfulness, accuracy, quality, schedule and budget. Each question should also provide the client the opportunity to share comments.

HOW SHOULD YOU DISTRIBUTE? Guerra believes that client surveys should be personal.

"It's better to have deep, insightful commentary from a smaller group – say 30 or 40 people – than to collect bland data from 200 people through an impersonal, rigid quantitative survey," he says.

He also believes that outreach is best done by a relatively objective person or group.

"Externally, many industry-specific consulting firms do client surveys. Internally, the survey can work if it's performed by a marketing manager or staff person. It shouldn't be performed by someone too close to the client or the projects the firm is working on, though that person can help create the interview questions," he says. "Either way, the person or group conducting the interview must have at least a rudimentary understanding of the industry and the firm's markets and services."

See SURVEYS, page 4

GOOD TO KNOW

More than half of firms (51 percent) have a formal method or process to solicit ongoing client feedback regarding the firm's performance.

Source: 2013 Project Management Study, ZweigWhite: www.zweigwhite.com/p-2160-project-management-survey-2013.

SURVEYS, from page 3

How do you get clients to respond? Overall, letting clients know how much the firm values their input works well.

Orcutt advises that as part of the feedback process, the individual completing the survey should receive a pop-up thank you once they have submitted the survey (with wording designed by the A/E firm).

"We also recommend that individuals sending the surveys remember to occasionally personally thank their clients for taking the time to complete the surveys and make sure to tell them how important it is to helping serve them better," Orcutt says.

Additionally, research at Client Feedback Tool indicates that 24 percent of all survey replies included a score below, "Met Expectations." However, when firms follow up with their client to hear more about the ways they can adjust their process to better serve them, follow-up surveys saw the occurrence of scores below "Met Expectations" go down by 83 percent.

How should you use the data? Many times, firm leaders will digest the results and do little or nothing more, Guerra says.

"They might make a few phone calls and then put it aside. I've had clients follow up personally with everyone who participated to thank them and discuss the results – specific to that respondent or just in general, depending on the situation. A few clients took the compiled data and actually distributed the results internally and externally (including a press release)," he says.

The key is to take the results seriously, take action to correct any negative issues that arise, reinforce and reward the areas that shine, and act quickly on any market intelligence that comes through.

"At the same time, while the survey results should inform the planning process, they shouldn't drive the process completely. There are limits on the value of client surveys," Guerra says.

Orcutt says that we have all heard, "What is measured improves" but, "This does not mean that individuals within the firm are not trying to satisfy their clients, but rather they may not have been aware of the preferences of each client. Once individuals are aware of their client preferences, they just naturally adjust their process to align with these preferences."

Data can also be used as part of the evaluation of staff strengths.

> "It's better to have deep, insightful commentary from a smaller group – say 30 or 40 people – than to collect bland data from 200 people through an impersonal, rigid quantitative survey."

"Organizational strength is enhanced by having individuals serve in the role in which they provide the highest and greatest value (and are typically the happiest)," Orcutt says. "Individuals who typically get very high scores in the production area (schedule, budget and accuracy) are likely team members who are more comfortable in 'getting it done' than in serving in a business development role. Conversations with these team members related to training may revolve around strengthening these skills. At the same time, individuals who get very high scores in the relationship area (responsiveness, helpfulness and quality) may well be the firm's strongest business development team members. Again, training for these individuals may be geared to strengthen these skills."

Additionally, if the firm receives challenging feedback (or comments), Client Feedback Tool coaches its clients to follow up promptly by contacting respondents and telling them how much they appreciate their feedback. As part of the email, they can indicate that they would really love to sit down and discuss comments more fully. They can request that the client provide a couple of days/dates that would be convenient to them.

"This not only affirms the value of the information the client provided, but also makes it comfortable for them to set a time for and prepare their thoughts for further discussion," Orcutt says.

CALENDAR

PRINCIPALS ACADEMY: Don't miss the last 2013 edition of The Principals Academy, a crash course in all aspects of managing a professional services firm, Nov. 14 and 15 in San Francisco.

The program is presented by a team of speakers – including ZweigWhite founder and CEO Mark Zweig – with extensive experience working with and for A/E firms. The two-day agenda covers six critical areas of business management from the unique perspectives of architecture, engineering and environmental consulting firms, and is presented in tutorial and case study workshop sessions. The Principals Academy program also includes a case study workshop session that will provide an opportunity to practice implementing these management strategies in a supervised test-case scenario.

For more information or to register, call 800-466-6275 or log on to www.zweigwhite.com/seminars/tpa.

RESOURCES

MANAGEMENT COMPENSATION SURVEY: How much is enough to keep your firm's top managers from running to the competition? How much is too much and could end up hurting your firm's bottom line?

It's a tough job to find a balance between the two. Knowing salary standards and bonuses for top managers in the A/E/P & environmental consulting industry can help you determine what your key managers should be earning during hiring and salary review processes. ZweigWhite's 2013-2014 Management Compensation Survey covers salaries, bonuses, overtime pay, and total compensation for all top managers, including project managers and information technology, human resources, financial and marketing directors.

Whether you're looking to find out if you're paying top managers their worth or you want to make sure you're earning your fair share, this book will answer all your questions about managers' salaries, bonuses, overtime pay, and total compensation. Don't take another step toward salary reviews or business planning without first getting your copy of the latest edition of this important report!

For more information or to buy a copy, call 800-466-6275 or log on to www.zweigwhite.com/p-2173-management-compensation-survey-2013-2014.

DEVELOPMENT

How to be a sales superstar

12 tips from a national recruiting company.

By LIISA SULLIVAN
Correspondent

"If you are not taking care of your customer, your competitor will."

- Bob Hooey, business success coach

More sales equals more growth. It's that simple. So, whether you are trying to identify sales superstars or working to be one yourself, knowing what to look for and what to do are key.

"We use an external provider that identifies if someone seems to have that skill set/talent or not," says Kim Gresham, national leader of HR and associate at **Golder Associates** (Toronto, ON), an 8,000-person consulting, design, and construction services firm. "We have found this to be helpful in learning about peoples' strengths and weaknesses."

Sales Trax, a national recruiting company uniting sales people and sales opportunities through career fairs and a sales-specific job board, offers the following 12 tips on how to become a sales superstar.

1) **Successful salespeople focus on closing the sale and the relationship.** Selling is about building a trusting relationship and partnership by becoming a resource, helping them to solve problems, and satisfying needs. Often, this leads to referrals and customer trust and loyalty.

2) **People buy when they are ready to buy, not when you need to sell.** It's important to discover those "real" reasons or circumstances as to why a prospect would buy now, later, not at all, or never. Once you have discovered their real issues, tailor your appeal to those specific needs, desires and buying circumstances.

3) **Sell value.** Most poorly trained salespeople tend to lower the price when they receive price resistance. Any price, no matter how low, will typically seem high to a prospect or customer if their perceived value is low. Sales superstars sell value and don't defend price. In the long run, it is much easier to justify high price if the value is there, than poor quality and constant product/service problems.

4) **Accurate and timely information is the key to success in selling.** One of the biggest mistakes poor salespeople make is that they give information before they get information. In other words, they talk too much. Sales superstars help the prospect become comfortable with buying their products or services. Information is power and successful salespeople are masters at uncovering needs, problems, prejudices, concerns and desires in a timely and truthful way.

5) **Identify intent.** If two people want to do business together they won't let details get in the way. However, if a prospect doesn't want to do business with you they will let even the slightest detail get in the way. Sales superstars know how to identify the prospect's real intent or their purpose. They are not easily misled and tend to probe deeper when they feel they are not getting the real truth from the prospect or customer.

6) **A key concept to keep in mind while selling is that the close of the sale is not the end of the sales process, but the beginning of the sales relationship.** After-sales service is the key to keeping sales closed and keeping customers satisfied and buying again. One of the keys is to promise a lot and deliver more. In other words, exceed customer expectations – wow them with service.

7) **Always improving.** Sales superstars are willing to invest in the continued improvement of their skills, attitudes and philosophy. They do not typically wait for their organization to invest in them and their future value. They take full responsibility for the quality of their life and learning and are proactive in seeking out learning opportunities. They take advantage of networking opportunities and create strategic alliance relationships.

8) **Time and territory management.** Sales superstars understand the importance of using every available selling minute to its full advantage. Before you can improve your use of time to sell you need to get a handle on how you are spending your time and how you are abusing it. Here's a valuable tip: For one week carry a stopwatch and start it when in the presence of a prospect or customer to sell only and then stop it when you leave. After the sales visit, don't reset the clock, but keep a running accumulative total of time spent selling in one week. You can do this with every sales activity (i.e., how much time is spent on the telephone prospecting for new business, travel time, doing paperwork, in meetings, doing research or solving client problems). This simple exercise will provide a fairly accurate picture of where time or territory management improvements can be made.

9) **Discover the prospect's sense of urgency or create it.** From the opening remark to the final closing statement, the sales superstar is there to sell. They are serious about helping the prospect to solve their problems.

10) **Never give up control of the sales process.** A common mistake some salespeople make is that they lose control of the sales process at some point. For example, they quote a price before they have had a chance to build value; or they don't ask enough questions early in the sales process. Control of the sales process is one of the key strategies of the sales superstar. They understand that control is not manipulation, but is in the ultimate best interests of the prospect or client.

11) **Never project buying prejudices into the sales process.** When you project personal beliefs into the sales process you are assuming that everyone who buys or does not buy, is doing so for the same reasons you would or would not. The sales superstar leaves personal biases, prejudices and opinions at home.

12) **Never lose passion.** Passion shouts to the world, "I am here to stay; I am here to make a difference; I will leave my mark in this world." If you have lost or are losing your passion, do whatever is necessary to get it back.

Making your web presence relevant

Don't settle for your website being merely a place to shout "me, Me, ME!"

Bernie Siben

THE FAST LANE

I wrote about how firms are differentiating their websites in the May 2012 issue (#245) of **THE ZWEIG MARKETING LETTER** (now part of **THE ZWEIG LETTER**). More accurately, the article was about how firms think they differentiate their websites, but really don't.

I looked at the websites of the first 10 large A/E firms that came to mind and discovered an amazingly high level of "sameness" in both content and navigation – "About Us" (10 sites); "Careers" (10 sites); "Contact Us" (10 sites); "Locations" (nine sites); "News" (nine sites); "Experience" or "Projects" (seven sites); "Market Sectors" (six sites) and "Services" (five sites).

Some of the sites that seemed to be missing a few navigation buttons (i.e. lower numbers on the above topics) actually had the appropriate navigation button but gave it a different label. One site actually had a navigation button called "Why We Are Different," or something to that effect. When you clicked the link, you were taken to a list of everything that was different about that firm. Unfortunately, every item on that list was something that had been said by a large number of competing A/E firms.

Why is this? I think it's because most firms contemplating a new or updated website, no matter how creative and original they want to be, start the planning process by looking at the websites of some of their major competitors to see what those firms are doing online, and that seems to color planning efforts.

There is a tendency to look for what is common about competing firms' websites and assume that is what the typical client is used to seeing – and, by extension, that is what the typical client wants to see.

Question: Do you want to work for "the typical client" or do you want to work for the client who thinks beyond today's boundaries, who understands that a new future arrives every day, and who knows how to value what you contribute to his process, his business and his future?

If the latter type of client is the one you want, then it has to begin with your website, because that is where most new clients are introduced to you. For existing clients, when you launch a new website, you have a chance to significantly change their perception of your firm, your people, your capabilities and – most importantly – what you can do for them.

When clients, whether new or prospective, look at your website, their question is not: "What can you do for me?"

Their question is: "What can you do for me that I will value?"

The answer to this question will be found in everything about your website that is different from what the client sees in every other AEC/environmental firm's website, and the more specific goal is this: Rather than making your website a place to congratulate yourself on how wonderful you are, make your website truly relevant to your clients.

Here are some suggestions:

- On your "About Us" page, make sure you tell your clients how everything you've written about can help them make their businesses more successful. Clients do not always draw connections. If you hired someone, tell them how the new person's presence can have a positive impact on their projects.

See BERNIE SIBEN, page 8

Most firms contemplating a new or updated website, no matter how creative and original they want to be, start the planning process by looking at the websites of some of their major competitors to see what those firms are doing online, and that seems to color planning efforts.

The barriers we create

What's standing in the way of doing the best job possible for your clients?

Christine Brack

PM PERSPECTIVES

Last month's column focused on a few key internal barriers project managers and designers cited when asked in surveys, "What's standing in the way of doing the best job with each other?" Things aren't going to turn out well for anyone when the firm becomes its own worst enemy. It's already a tough world out there; why do we make it even more difficult for ourselves?

In those same company surveys, we also asked, "What's standing in the way of doing the best job possible for our clients?" After all, we are here to serve our clients. And don't they rely on us for the best job possible?

Firm leaders are too often surprised to read the responses the survey produces. Maybe they have removed themselves too far from the actual production and execution of what their firm sells. When they comb through results and put aside the denial or excuses, they typically make it a mission to change things for the better.

Are some of these barriers keeping your firm from doing the best it possibly can?

- **QA/QC.** *"Seems our new policy is to limit quality/time needed to perform projects. Budgets are important to be profitable but it also hinders a quality project. I feel clients will suffer. Aren't there other areas in the company where we can trim expenses to help make money?"* The plight of the diligent, responsible designer. I hear this so very often. Ironically, the message on the website proclaims the very opposite and the language in the proposal talks strongly of a defined QA/QC process. Imagine the horror if a client ever read a statement like that about their architect, engineer, or environmental consultant. You're never going to improve the bottom line by shorting this step.
- **Communication.** *"We have project managers who are terrible at communication but for some reason they are still managing projects."* These PMs likely have some technical expertise needed for the project, or have several years of design experience that warranted them this role. Ninety percent of the project manager's time is spent communicating, though, so if clear, timely, filtered communication is a skill the PM lacks, consequently the team, project, and client are going to suffer. If you don't believe me, ask your designers about the quality of communication channels they work with and. Hopefully, they won't be saying things like, "Some PMs 'forget' to inform us of changes in design or deadlines. This just makes us angry and rushed. This concerns me it happens too often."
- **The under/over problem.** *"There is a disconnect between what we can do and how long it takes us to do it. We make promises to clients with unrealistic timeframes and we take all the pressure to deliver."* Underestimating, over-promising, and under-delivering are all consequences of poor project management and bad internal information. This creates a very stressful environment. No one wants to work like that, so why do it? Chances are old budgets based on hours that were really under-reported feed into the budgets of today. Clients don't always know how long things take – but apparently neither do managers in this industry. It all eventually reaches a breaking point.

We make many promises about what we can do for the client but we will quickly fall short of delivering it with these sorts of things going on. Again, ask what's standing in the way of doing the best job possible for your clients. See what you get in reply.

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We make many promises about what we can do for the client but we will quickly fall short of delivering it with these sorts of things going on.

NEWS

Back on the Inc. 500|5000

ZweigWhite traveled a long road back to status originally earned in the 1990s.

The members of the ZweigWhite team who made it to the Inc. 500|5000 Conference, accompanied by Inc. columnist Norm Brodsky. From left to right: Mark Zweig, SonyaLea Stout, Christine Brack, Brodsky, Chad Clinehens, Brad Workman and João Ferreira.

ZweigWhite is officially back. The publisher of **THE ZWEIG LETTER** is among the fastest growing private companies in the country, ranking a respectable 4,757 on the Inc. 500|5000 List.

It is the seventh fastest growing firm in the State of Arkansas.

The firm celebrated the return to the coveted ranking at the Inc. 500|5000 Conference in Washington, D.C., Oct. 10-12 by sending six representatives to the event, including founder and CEO Mark Zweig.

"I just enjoy the energy of being around so many successful, can-do entrepreneurs who aren't whining about the economy!," Zweig (@MarkZweig) tweeted during the event's awards and gala dinner.

Complete results of the Inc. 500|5000, including company profiles and an interactive database that can be sorted by industry, region, and other criteria, can be found at www.inc.com/5000.

"Not all the companies in the Inc. 500|5000 are in glamorous industries, but in their fields they are as famous as household name companies simply by virtue of being great at what they do. They are the hidden champions of job growth and innovation, the real muscle of the American economy," said Inc. Editor Eric Schurenberg.

The 2013 Inc. 500|5000 is ranked according to percentage revenue growth when comparing 2009 to 2012. To qualify, companies must have been founded and generating revenue by March 31, 2009. They had to be U.S.-based, privately held, for profit, and independent – not subsidiaries or divisions of other companies – as of Dec. 31, 2012.

BERNIE SIBEN, from page 6

- In your "Market Sectors" section, talk about why engaging your firm can help the client succeed in that particular market sector.
- In your "Services" sector, talk about the kinds of projects that use those services, and the value those services bring to those projects. If you talk about how the combination of specific services produces synergies that are beneficial to clients, make sure you explain the benefit.
- When you discuss "Projects or Experience," include a discussion of the challenges a specific project faced and how you overcame those challenges. Tell how many firms were on the team and what creative management processes were developed. Talk about your process(es) for obtaining client feedback on how the firm is performing, and the milestones at which such processes are implemented. Include client testimonials so that other clients can see how your services benefitted firms like theirs.
- In the "News" section, don't just pile up the press releases. Introduce or conclude each one with how such news could have a positive impact on clients and/or projects.

Make viewing your website more convenient for your readers by remembering that laptop screens and desktop monitors are landscape formats. Other devices can be both landscape and portrait. Don't design your website so that every page is in portrait format, requiring excessive scrolling. Most websites leave half the screen blank and crowd everything into the center. Don't be afraid to spread things out, letting the space between items make each of them easier to find and read.

Let your website be a way for the client to come to know you. Don't settle for your website being merely a place to shout "me, Me, ME!"

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PROFILE

Affinis Corporation's happy co-workers

Civil engineering firm attains top rank in 2013 Best Firms To Work For.

By LIISA SULLIVAN
Correspondent

The staff at Best Firm Affinis Corp.

In 2001, the vision for the creation of **Affinis Corp**. (Overland Park, KS), a 26-person engineering firm, had three elements:

1) To be the employer of choice

2) To be the consultant of choice

3) To take a trip (in this order)

Mission accomplished for number one item on the list as the firm placed No. 1 in the civil engineering category on ZweigWhite's 2013 Best Firms To Work For ranking.

"Our founders firmly believed, and still believe, that happy co-workers make happy clients," says Peggy Amor, a marketing coordinator who has worked at Affinis for two years. "They wanted to create a culture that was unique to what they had experienced at other firms, and to focus on having satisfied co-workers. Part of that culture is openness and transparency when it comes to company performance and decision-making. We are truly a value-based, mission-driven company striving to communicate action with our words."

Affinis was founded in 2002 by Rick Worrel and John Thomas, successful and experienced engineers respected throughout the Midwest. Worrel talks often about how their original desire was to create a firm that wasn't like all the other engineering firms. As a result, Affinis emerged from the desire to build a great workplace and be a great client partner. The company wanted to build long-lasting relationships with co-workers, clients and colleagues by listening, learning, delivering and celebrating.

> "Our founders firmly believed, and still believe, that happy co-workers make happy clients. They wanted to create a culture that was unique to what they had experienced at other firms, and to focus on having satisfied co-workers."

Open up. Engineers and engineering firms often get a bad rap for being dull, stuffy, or awkward; Affinis is none of those.

"Our culture here is about making life easier for our co-workers and our clients. That translates into an open atmosphere where it is easy to ask questions, fun to come to work, and no one is hung up on titles or official duties," Amor says. "Everyone is happy to pitch in wherever they can and 'overhead' members of the team are just as valued as 'billable' co-workers."

Amor says that it's great that the firm is being recognized for its efforts toward creating a positive work environment for its co-workers while, at the same time, providing clients with solutions to fulfill their needs.

"Our efforts are continual, and the ZweigWhite process for being named a 'Best Firm' provides us with the feedback necessary to evaluate how we're doing. It's a nice designation, but it's also one that will compel us to keep improving," she says.

Hiring power. A Best Firm to Work For award also carries some weight when it comes to recruitment.

Cindy Martens, manager of recruiting and retention, has been with Affinis for eight years. She says that since they are a small firm, they can often get overlooked by potential candidates who pursue positions at larger firms because those firms have name recognition.

"The award allows us to promote and talk about our place on the Best Firms To Work For list and to offer some extra firepower to bolster our reputation," she says.

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ON THE MOVE

APEX NAMES CEO: Apex Companies, LLC (Rockville, MD), a 500-person national energy, water resources and environmental consulting and engineering firm, has named **Peter Ceribelli** its CEO.

As a seasoned environmental consulting and engineering executive with 30 years experience, Ceribelli will be responsible for defining and implementing Apex's strategic vision by providing comprehensive leadership to ensure Apex's position at the forefront of the industry.

"Pete Ceribelli is well-respected in markets served by the environmental consulting and engineering industry, including oil and gas, real estate, transportation, municipal, and federal," stated Peter Young, Apex's chairman and founder. "His success has been shaped by a progression of key internal and market-facing roles providing Pete with an advantageous perspective that will help Apex Companies to continue on its considerable growth trajectory."

Ceribelli is an effective, hands-on leader who developed his career through a series of advancing positions at **Weston Solutions**, a global environmental consulting and engineering firm headquartered in Pennsylvania. Prior to joining Apex, since 2009 Ceribelli served as Weston's COO. Ceribelli is a proven forward-thinker and an ideal fit for Apex Companies' unique culture of teamwork, accountability, quality focus, efficiency, and a client-centered approach.

Apex is a portfolio company of Tailwind Capital, a private equity firm focused on investing in growth-oriented middle market companies. Ceribelli will be working closely with Tailwind and others on Apex's board of directors to develop an operational and organizational model to achieve benchmark profitably and significantly expand the company.

LEA HIRES: Littlejohn Engineering Associates (Nashville, TN), a 157-person engineering firm, announced that **Tom Dittmaier** has joined the Knoxville, Tenn., office as a senior project manager. He will also be serving in the dual role as business manager in the Johnson City office. Dittmaier has over 30 years of experience in the planning, design, and construction of utilities and is a trusted advisor with numerous municipal clients. He brings his expertise and emphasis on water and wastewater treatment systems to assist LEA's growing municipal and utility business throughout the southeast. Dittmaier's substantial experience includes over 12 years as a professional in utility management, formerly serving as vice president of engineering, and director of operations and engineering manager for the Knoxville Utilities Board.

"Tom is widely known within the utility community and has a well-deserved reputation for strong leadership and professionalism", said Scott McDonald, regional manager for the Knoxville and Chattanooga offices. "Tom's broad understanding, background, and experience in the management, design, installation, inspection, operation and optimization of water and wastewater treatment systems for both industrial and, in particular, for municipal clients, will allow us to expand our range of services for current clients, as well as provide opportunities to expand into new markets."

Prior to joining LEA, Dittmaier was Knoxville office manager and project manager for **Burns and McDonnell** (Omaha, NE), a national firm with expertise serving all facets of the utility, municipal and industrial engineering fields. Dittmaier will have the support of a team of engineers, surveyors, environmental scientists, and resident inspectors in both locations. He will bring significant value to our growing municipal engineering team and will play a vital role in assisting LEA's clients in Tennessee and the Southeast.

BECKER MORGAN GROUP HIRES: Becker Morgan Group (Delaware, MD), an architecture and engineering services firm, has filled two new positions.

Dustin Dooyema has become an architectural designer in the Salisbury, M.D. office. Dooyema brings over six years of experience in the field of architectural design. Dooyema previously worked for one of the largest architectural firms in the Southern New Mexico/West Texas region where he gained experience in educational, residential, and commercial projects. His project experience with Becker Morgan Group includes the William F. Cooke, Jr. Elementary School in Wilmington, Del.; Walgreens in Ocean Pines, M.D.; and residences in Ocean City, M.D. and Corolla, N.C.

Elaina Iosue joins the Salisbury office as a marketing assistant. Iosue will provide corporate marketing support for all three offices. She has previous experience in public relations, marketing, and event planning.

MEANS JOINS BHC RHODES: Jeff Means joined **BHC RHODES** (Kansas City, KS), a surveying firm, as a project surveyor and will lead a team comprised of both a survey field crew and in-house technical staff. Means has 18 years of surveying experience which has been largely on the Missouri side of the Kansas City metro, where for many years he co-owned Brown Means & Associates in Blue Springs, Mo. He will continue to build upon his long time Missouri relationships while taking on new business expansion in the market for BHC RHODES.

Means' expertise includes mapping, boundary, construction, park survey, and planning on recognizable projects such as the Kansas City International airport, Kansas City Parks and Recreation and Branson Landing in Branson, Mo.

"Jeff has experience on both ends of the surveying business. He has been in the field as a land surveyor and in the office managing operations and sales. From his experience on both ends, he knows exceptional customer service is imperative and that fits perfectly with our 'No Problem' customer service philosophy," said Wil Anderson, surveying manager.

AFFINIS, from page 9

AN EMPLOYEE CHIMES IN... Cliff Speegle, a project engineer with Affinis for five years, says there are many reasons why he loves working there. However, he says, it all really boils down to the people.

"My co-workers make it fun to come to the office every day," he says. "I also know that they will do what they can to help me succeed. Everyone cares about making life easier for those around them as well as for our clients."

THE COVETED SCHMITTY. While it does not seem that there is much more incentive needed to motivate these happy employees, a little nudge never hurts. "The Schmitty" is an award named after a dear friend and former co-worker, Dale Schmidtberger, who passed away in 2003.

He exemplified all of the great qualities that Affinis strives to maintain.

As a result, Affinis decided to honor this gentleman and his contribution through "The Schmitty."

This coveted award is given out annually to the person who most closely exemplifies the qualities Affinis promotes – a person whose vision, mission and values match theirs. Martens received it in 2012 and Speegle was bestowed the honor in 2011. Time will tell who gets to walk the red carpet in 2013.

PROFILE

CFO fuels company growth

O'Neal ranks high on the 2013 Hot Firm List, a testament to a successful growth path.

By LIISA SULLIVAN
Correspondent

Judy Castleberry, CFO at **O'Neal** (Greenville, SC), a 250-person integrated design and construction firm with offices in Atlanta and Raleigh, N.C., doesn't hide the pride she feels about the company's growth over the last several years.

"This growth has afforded opportunities for our employee-owners," she says.

O'Neal ranks No. 4 on **THE ZWEIG LETTER** 2013 Hot Firm List. It also is No. 14 on ZweigWhite's 2013 Best Firms to Work For ranking.

Prior to joining O'Neal in 2001, Castleberry was a partner at Elliott Davis, LLP, one of the largest accounting, tax and consulting services firms in the Southeast.

She has more than 15 years of experience in public accounting, including managing and budgeting, audits and reviews; providing management and consulting services; preparing and reviewing complex federal and multi-state tax returns, forecasts and projections; and creating and strengthening production client relationships.

As O'Neal's CFO, Castleberry provides financial, risk management and contract management. She also serves as a member of O'Neal's board of directors and is active in leadership roles with the Construction Financial Management Association and other professional and charitable organizations. She holds a Bachelor of Science and Bachelor of Arts in accounting from John Carroll University.


Judy Castleberry, CFO, O'Neal.

"As we continue to grow, we will continue to invest in adding new employees, training, and technology."

A CONVERSATION WITH CASTLEBERRY

THE ZWEIG LETTER: What are the key strengths for an effective CFO?

Judy Castleberry: A strong CFO has to be passionate about what he/she does and about the company he/she represents. He or she needs to have a solid understanding of their company's operations. It's critical for success. The ability to problem-solve by looking for win-win solutions is also vital.

TZL: How would you describe your work style?

JC: I am an integrator who enjoys working with people on a personal level and figuring out how to put the pieces together.

TZL: What are you top priorities for the end of 2013/2014?

JC: Our top priority for the remainder of 2013 is to ensure that we safely finish the year strong. As O'Neal moves into 2014, we want to continue to focus on building upon several recent initiatives that will allow us to provide new and expanded capabilities to the market. This includes new strategic business units, including our Advanced Facilities group, which focuses on automated manufacturing, logistics and distribution facilities in the food, retail, and industrial markets; and our Equipment Relocation group that helps companies optimize their operations and manufacturing assets, and includes equipment relocation, reconfiguration, and consolidation.

TZL: What is your favorite part of the job?

JC: I enjoy the opportunity to work with a strong team that is focused on growing our shareholder value and managing the opportunities along the way.

TZL: What do you enjoy doing in your spare time?

JC: I enjoy lake time with my family, traveling and relaxing with a good book.

Castleberry looks to the past and reflects on the future when she says, "We have experienced the strongest growth period in all of our 38-year history. As we continue to grow, we will continue to invest in adding new employees, training, and technology."

She says that she truly believes that O'Neal has the best and the brightest talent in its industry.

Since 1975, O'Neal has evolved from a modest engineering company with a two-person staff and a basement office to a multi-million dollar business with an international client-base. O'Neal has developed a reputation for superior industrial design and construction with the successful completion of well-known projects for clients including BMW, Michelin, and Fiberweb.

"A respected work portfolio can only take you so far," Castleberry says. "What really speaks volumes about our company are the years of employee retention and satisfaction our employees demonstrate. Nearly 80 percent of our employees own stock in this company, an incentive-based practice that is proven to increase client and employee satisfaction."

TRANSACTIONS

HAYNES WHALEY JOINS CARDNO: Haynes Whaley Associates (Houston, TX), a 93-person structural engineering firm, has merged with **Cardno**, the Brisbane, Australia-based 8,000 person professional infrastructure and environmental services company with expertise in the development and improvement of physical and social infrastructure for communities around the world.

"Haynes Whaley Associates' focus has always been to provide our clients structural engineering expertise with the highest level of integrity," said Larry Whaley, president and CEO of Haynes Whaley Associates. "We are pleased to join Cardno, a company that shares our values and corporate culture and offers us the ability to continue to grow our business by expanding our services domestically and globally through their 290 offices worldwide."

Haynes Whaley, which will be known as Cardno Haynes Whaley, offers specialized structural engineering services for a broad range of commercial, public and institutional projects. Haynes Whaley has completed several prominent projects across the United States, including The Menil Collection in Houston, Renzo Piano's first project in the United States; Market Square in Washington, D.C.; Hobby Center for the Performing Arts in Houston; the Coronado Springs Resort at Disney World; the National Biodefense & Countermeasure Center at Fort Detrick, Md.; and NASA's Neutral Buoyancy Lab in Houston. Current projects include ExxonMobil's new corporate campus in North Houston, The University of Texas Medical Branch Galveston Jennie Sealy Replacement Hospital, and the new downtown Houston Convention Center Hotel.

Haynes Whaley works nationally, as well as internationally, with projects in 40 states, the District of Columbia, Africa, Caribbean, Malaysia, and Singapore.

"We are pleased to have such a high caliber firm join us," said Paul Gardiner, president of Cardno's Americas Region. "They share our values of innovation, great people and partnering. With Haynes Whaley, we can now offer both of our client bases comprehensive development services from concept through construction. Their services complement our existing portfolio of offerings in the public, commercial and institutional arenas."

Within the United States, Cardno provides infrastructure and environmental solutions for clients such as DR Horton, Costco, the Department of Defense, universities, federal penitentiaries, oil and gas entities, hospitals, municipalities and communities. Key land development projects include the Encore Development Site in Tampa, Fla., Sun City Carolina Lakes Master Plan in Lancaster County, S.C., Bayou Chico Brownfields Redevelopment in Pensacola, Fla. and AmberGlen Site Development and Management.

Following Cardno's normal strategy, shareholders of Haynes Whaley Associates will become Cardno shareholders and remain active leaders in the company. Cardno Haynes Whaley will operate as part of Cardno's Engineering and Environmental Services Division in the U.S.

FIRMS ON THE MOVE

SWCA EXPANDS: SWCA Environmental Consultants (Phoenix, AZ), a 750-person environmental consulting firm, is expanding operations to Tulsa, Okla., to meet the needs of current and future oil and gas clients in the Mississippi Lime Formation in Oklahoma and Kansas.

"SWCA's project experience in Oklahoma and Kansas is vast," said John Thomas, SWCA president and CEO. "We have worked on more than 50 projects there since 1998, mobilizing crews from our Denver, Austin, Albuquerque, Houston, and Arlington offices. The combination of our project portfolio, depth of staff with local experience, and understanding of the marketplace positions SWCA well to capture additional work with a dedicated office in Tulsa."

In addition to providing natural and cultural resource consulting to the oil and gas industry, SWCA will serve clients in the state and local government, land development, water resources, power generation, transmission, and transportation sectors as oil and gas development increases pressure on local economies, roads, and commercial and residential infrastructure.

Arlington/Tulsa Office Director Micah Chambers will oversee the Oklahoma operations.

SWCA provides a full spectrum of environmental services focused on planning, natural and cultural resource management, permitting, regulatory compliance, and sustainability and climate change consulting. The company's growing team of professionals combines scientific expertise with in-depth knowledge of permitting and compliance protocols to achieve technically sound, cost-effective solutions for environmental projects throughout the United States and its territories.