

Beware of the inexperienced client



Mark Zweig

They can wreak havoc in your organization, Mark Zweig writes, identifying some problems.

Here's one of the dangers they never seem to discuss in school or during early professional development training sessions for architects and engineers – the inexperienced client.

The inexperienced client can wreak havoc on your staff, your profitability, and even your own morale. These are people who don't know much of anything about the design or construction process because they have no experience. As a result, they often have some bad thinking that can really screw things up!

Here's more of what I am talking about:

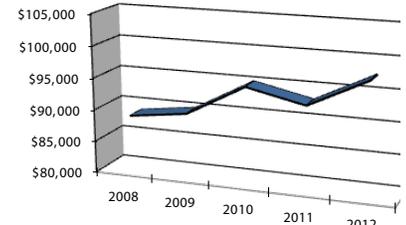
- **Roles.** The inexperienced client doesn't understand the roles of each of the key players. They often don't understand the differences between architects and engineers, and environmental consultants and contractors, so they don't know who does what. This can lead to perceptions that someone may not be doing their job when, in fact, it isn't their job.
- **Fees.** The inexperienced client may assume that you are supposed to "bid" all your fees and that all design or environmental professionals are the same. The whole idea of qualifications-based selection is probably foreign to them. This can obviously lead to problems for you!
- **Relationships.** The inexperienced client sometimes develops an attitude that just because they have the money you HAVE to do what they tell you to do – even if it is unethical or, even worse, illegal. This can create huge

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The inexperienced client can wreak havoc on your staff, your profitability, and even your own morale. These are people who don't know much of anything about the design or construction process because they have no experience.

TRENDLINES

Value of IT



Like other firm directors, IT directors have seen their salaries rise and fall in the couple of years. This year, IT directors' median base salary has reached a five-year high of \$97,569, according to the 2012 "Information Technology Survey." In 2011, the median base salary for IT directors dropped to \$93,000 from \$95,000 in 2010 – after climbing to \$90,000 in 2009 from \$88,000 in 2008.

– Margot Suydam, Survey Manager

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A/E BUSINESS NEWS

BEAUTIFUL HOMES: Even as new and existing home sales and prices climb, homeowners are prioritizing aesthetics before profit, according to a recent Houzz & Home Survey conducted among users of the Houzz app and website. Houzz is an online platform for home design and remodeling, with more than four million unique users each month.

Among homeowners planning to build, remodel or decorate in the next two years, 86 percent cited "improving the look and feel of the space" as an important driver for remodeling projects, while only 47 percent cited "increasing home value." The gap between these priorities was consistent across all income levels and demographic groups.

Homeowners say they are more likely to cut back in other areas, such as vacations and other big-ticket purchases, than to delay or decrease the budget for their home improvement plans.

"We expected that in this economy Americans' highest priority would be increasing home value, but instead we found people are focused on pleasing themselves, not the next owner," said Liza Hausman, vice president of marketing for Houzz. "Homes today are doing double or even triple duty as workplace, stay-cation, gym and more."

Take out a loan to get that beautiful home?

"No way," say 70 percent of today's homeowners.

They'd rather cut back elsewhere or do some of the work themselves.

Even upscale homeowners are taking a hands-on approach to building, remodeling and decorating projects. The survey found that while 45 percent of homeowners at upper income levels (\$150,000-plus) are choosing to hire an architect, interior designer, general contractor or another remodeling or decorating professional to complete a project in its entirety, an equal number of them are combining professional help and DIY efforts, a proportion only slightly smaller than the 49 percent taking this combination approach in lower income brackets.

Kitchens and bathrooms are the most popular remodeling projects among Houzz users, with 48 percent of respondents planning a bathroom remodel, and 45 percent redoing a kitchen in the next two years. Midwesterners have the highest budgets for kitchen and bath remodels at \$30,500 and \$13,600 respectively, while

the South is allocating the least at \$23,800 and \$11,600.

The Houzz & Home Survey analyzes the remodeling and decorating project history and plans among Houzz users in the U.S. and Canada, motivational drivers behind these projects, homeowners' plans for hiring remodeling and design professionals, the factors that go into selecting a service provider and the impact of the economy on residential decorating and remodeling plans.

The Houzz & Home Survey was emailed to registered users of the Houzz app and website in February 2012. Results are based on 29,127 respondents (87 percent homeowners, 13 percent renters). Edge Research conducted the survey.

CALENDAR

AEC TECHNOLOGY CONFERENCE:

Technology is changing the way AEC firms do business.

For over a decade, ZweigWhite's annual AEC Technology Strategies Conference has provided IT professionals from architecture and engineering firms an opportunity to join their peers and share advances in technology, as well as solutions to the unique management challenges IT professionals are facing.

The 2012 AEC Technology Strategies Conference program will feature presentations on a range of topics, including how IT professionals can further marketing and business development efforts, the role of the IT leader in AEC firms today, what the qualifications should be for IT professionals in the industry, what IT professionals need to know about financial management systems in their firms, and how to evaluate and integrate the latest innovations in technology products and systems.

Other topics include managing the relationship between IT and everyone else in the firm, overcoming budget constraints, and overall topics on data management, storage, document sharing, and disaster recovery/security.

The conference will also include a panel discussion on the use of virtualized desktops and the pros/cons of competing technologies, including VMWare View, Xen Desktop, Parallels Hypervisor, and Windows RDP.

The AEC Technology Strategies Conference is scheduled for June 6-7, 2012 in Cambridge, Mass.

For more information or to register, log on to www.zweigwhite.com/events/AECTechnologyStrategies.

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problems in your relationship with them, their sense of whether or not you are acting as their advocate, and more (especially if you let them convince you to do something you know is wrong!). Your reputation is the most valuable thing you've got.

■ **Timelines.** Inexperienced clients don't understand how long things take nor do they understand the critical path. They may jump the gun in some areas and then hold up critical decisions in other areas because they don't understand the consequences.

■ **Micromanagement.** The inexperienced client sometimes likes to take over. This is because they don't trust you and they don't know the process.

I'm not saying you can't work for inexperienced clients. But, if you do, do so with your eyes wide open. Don't assume they are bad people or have ill-intent. That's probably NOT the case. But do plan on spending plenty of time educating them. Finally, be ready for some problems. Expect them, anticipate them, prepare for them and deal with them when they occur. ▲▲

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



38 West Trenton Blvd., Suite 101
Fayetteville, AR 72701

Mark Zweig | Publisher
mzweig@zweigwhite.com

João Ferreira | Managing Editor
jferreira@zweigwhite.com

Christina Zweig | Contributing Editor
christinaz@zweigwhite.com

Tel: 800-466-6275
Fax: 508-653-6522
E-mail: info@zweigwhite.com
Online: www.thezweigletter.com
Twitter: twitter.com/zweigwhite
Blog: zweigwhite.blogspot.com

Published continuously since 1992 by ZweigWhite, Fayetteville, Arkansas, USA. ISSN 1068-1310.

Issued weekly (48 issues/yr.). \$475 for one-year membership, \$775 for two-year membership.

Article reprints: For high-quality reprints, including Eprints and NXTprints, please contact The YGS Group at 717-399-1900, ext. 139, or e-mail TheZweigLetter@TheYGSGroup.com.

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TOP PLAYER

An unabashed overachiever

Hot Firm placing evidence of success.

John Scheffey says he is “annoyingly competitive” – and that has made all the difference. The firm he founded, **Core States Group** (Philadelphia, PA) is No. 157 on **THE ZWEIG LETTER** 2011 Hot Firm List and growing rapidly.

CSG, with 158 employees, provides integrated programs in architecture, engineering, program management, and construction management and development services. Scheffey says CSG is differentiated and uniquely positioned in the market, based on the ability to “provide in-house integrated services to our clients.”

THE ZWEIG LETTER: What does it mean to be a Hot Firm?

John Scheffey: A “Hot Firm” is made up of an innovative, passionate team that takes a proactive approach to business and isn’t afraid to take risks. The Hot Firm is an overachiever in the industry, outperforming its competitors and thriving in the worst of the economy because its people are constantly looking for ways to expand and improve business.

TZL: How did you get where you are today?

JS: With a background in civil engineering working in the petroleum market, I formed Core States Group with the intention of providing engineering and project management services to the retail petroleum industry. As we began building our reputation in the industry and forming a larger client base, it became evident that our skill sets could transfer to other industries such as retail, hospitality, banking, corporate and sustainability markets. It was only a matter of time before we developed a nationwide, integrated program delivery model, offering engineering, architecture, program management, development and construction services to these industries. We’ve experienced a tremendous growth over the past 13 years and we’re excited to continue.



John Scheffey,
President,
Core States
Group.

TZL: Do you remember your first paid job? What did you learn then that still influences the way you work today?

JS: My first job was a paperboy at the Philadelphia Evening Bulletin, the same job that my father had growing up. I definitely learned the value of hard work and realized that the harder you work, the bigger the reward.

TZL: What is it in your DNA that drives you to success? Is it audacity and risk-taking; a can-do attitude and a relentless pursuit of perfection; something else more abstract?

JS: I am annoyingly competitive.

TZL: In today’s difficult business climate, what does it take to succeed? Is the spectrum of failure a motivator?

JS: Relentless drive, confidence and the commitment to being better than everyone else is what I believe it takes to succeed. Failure is certainly a motivator; I want to know when there is a better way to do something because you can’t change what you don’t know.

TZL: Where do you see this industry in 10 or 20 years? What trends are influencing it? What about your company?

JS: I believe the industry will undergo “business stratification,” much like the differences in the upper class and the lower class in society. The top of the ladder will be the strongest and biggest 1 percent of A/E firms, and at the other end will be smaller, mom-and-pops; there will be no “middle class” A/E firms 20 years from now. Due to the athletic nature of Core States and the exponential growth we’ve experienced, I firmly believe Core States will be within that top 1 percent and ahead of industry trends.

As far as markets are concerned, since many businesses are now adopting sustainable initiatives, you’ll also see an increase in sustainable design and energy programs. Core States will continue to thrive due to the increase in demand for its services. As our reach grows, so will our expansion into new markets.

TZL: Do you hold someone as a special mentor? How did this person influence who you are?

JS: I do not consider one specific person as a mentor. However, across my career I’ve met various people that have made an impact on me. I genuinely enjoy being surrounded by people from which I can gain knowledge.

TZL: What’s the one trait you most admire in people and why?

JS: I’ve always admired mental acuity. Those who can think on their feet are usually the most successful, especially in a business environment where quick turnaround time is crucial.

TZL: Describe the most challenging thing you have ever done/the biggest challenge you have taken on outside of work.

JS: Outside of work, my biggest challenge is raising six kids and balancing the needs of both business and family.

TZL: What question would you ask of another Hot Firm leader?

JS: I would simply ask, “What’s next?”

TZL: What lesson learned would you pass along to a recent college graduate embarking on a career in the A/E/P and environmental consulting fields?

JS: I would tell a recent college graduate to never be afraid to go after what you want. I believe those who are afraid to tackle new challenges are at a disadvantage; there’s no personal growth there. Plus, those who are willing to undertake new challenges are the employees who drive a company to the next level. ▀▲

SURVEY

Firms keen to keep perks going

From snacks to sabbaticals, quirky benefits are still around in design firms.

By CHRISTINA ZWEIG
Contributing editor

When firms are forced to cut budgets (as in during the long-standing recession), one of the first things to go is usually benefits or “perks,” the little things that are not necessary to keep the company going, but definitely make working there a treat.

Whether it is basic compensation, incentive plans, recruiting efforts, retention strategies, or firm culture, taking care of “human capital” is a very important part of the design business. While perks they can be as small as a treat or as large as a trip, they definitely are one of the easiest ways to provide a little fun and keep morale up around the office.

In the introduction to *ZweigWhite’s 2012 “Policies, Procedures & Benefits Survey of Architecture, Engineering, Planning & Environmental Consulting Firms,”* Christine Brack, principal at *ZweigWhite*, writes, “We wouldn’t have much in the way of an organization if we didn’t have human capital – and as leaders it is our responsibility to take good care of them. But what does that mean exactly and how much does it mean?”

From foot massages to iPads, the best approach to providing perks is to give employees things they find substantively valuable, and this often varies from one firm to another. While only 64 percent of firms in the 2012 survey say they include bonuses in their annual budget, there are a many other ways they show employee appreciation.

In the survey’s section on “Unusual Benefits,” the most commonly cited was flex time/working hours (36 percent of firms), followed by financial benefits, vacation/time off/trips, and social events/celebrations, all re-

ported by 12 percent of firms. Fitness benefits/wellness programs were only reported in 9 percent of respondents, and parking/transportation and lunches/free food were each reported by 3 percent.

In recent years, many industries have implemented “summer hours” programs as an added perk; when employees are more likely to want to go on vacations or spend time with their families. According to the survey, 19 percent of firms offer some form of summer hours, 8 percent offer half days on Fridays, 3 percent offer every other Friday off, and 7 percent have some form of alternative hours.

DOESN’T HAVE TO COST MUCH.

Applied Technologies (Brookfield, WI), a 35-person multi-discipline engineering/architecture firm specializing in water/wastewater management, has been offering “food holidays” for the past five years. Kim D’Amato, marketing manager, says, “We offer monthly food holidays, such as Guacamole Day and Blueberry Pie Day. It’s an opportunity to relax and enjoy each other.”

D’Amato says the idea came after she saw something similar in an online marketing forum.

“To be quite honest, I love food and everyone around here does as well, so it seemed like a natural fit!,” she says. “I presented it to my boss as another (and cheap, \$40-\$60 per month) way to show our employees how much we appreciate them. In addition, it provides a nice opportunity to relax and socialize on a Thursday or Friday afternoon.”

Other uncommon perks listed in the 2012 “Policies, Procedures & Benefits Survey” included a pet friendly office, relaxed dress code, “fun budget” of \$100 per employee, fully stocked snack cabinet and soda/beer fridge, interest free loans to buy personal computers and even a design trip abroad.

During a 50th anniversary celebration marketing initiative, **KJWW Engineering Consultants** (Rock Is-

land, IL), a 450-person firm that provides consulting engineering services for building and infrastructure systems, decided to not only cater to clients, but to employees as well. The year began with a special 50th anniversary breakfast in each office with a presentation by the company president, Paul VanDuyne.

He surprised all employees with a free iPad and offered to pay \$30 toward the purchase of a protective cover for the iPad and \$20 every month for the first year toward an AT&T 3G network plan. To keep the party going, each office was given an allotment of money based on staff size toward special food events throughout the year. The treats were a way to recognize their hard work and also to bring staff together for some levity and bonding.

The firm also produced a special 50th anniversary book capturing the history and stories of the company. Using old files, project photos, employee photos, and archives, the 98-page book was told humorously from the point of view of the employees. Five hundred books were ordered for all employees, retirees, and deceased-employee family members.

EDSA (Ft. Lauderdale, FL) a landscape architecture firm with 120-people in their U.S. office, recently kicked off a unique opportunity for their employees. The Joseph J. Lalli Fellowship provides an opportunity for one of EDSA’s employees to travel for two weeks to further their skills and advance the profession of landscape architecture.

According to Cindy Eden, director of human resources, there is a \$5,000 grant and two weeks of paid time off.

“There is a jury of five people (one from EDSA and four from other companies) that will be selecting our first recipient in the next couple of weeks. It’s a very cool program and we are looking forward to announcing the first recipient,” Eden says. ▀▲

CASE STUDY

Evidence-based design at work

Case study exemplifies how healthcare facility enhanced patient care through better design.

Editor's note: This is the second of a two-part series.

By LIISA SULLIVAN
Correspondent

Designers behind some of the nation's most prominent healthcare facilities rely on evidence-based design for the conceptualization and execution of their projects.

Geisinger Health Systems – Hospital for Advanced Medicine, located in Pennsylvania, is a shining example of such a project completed by **EwingCole** (Philadelphia, PA), a 340-person fully-integrated architecture, engineering and design firm.

EwingCole employs many techniques that enable clients to make informed decisions so that planning and design solutions achieve the desired outcomes. Initiatives include charrettes/visioning workshops with all levels of staff and users, site visits/benchmarking, computer renderings, full-scale mockups, and post-occupancy evaluations.

Natalie Miovski, director of healthcare practice at EwingCole, shares the details of the Geisinger Health Systems project – an organization that has consistently been recognized for its healthcare and medical research contributions since its founding in 1915.

EwingCole, which has been designing for Geisinger Health System for more than 40 years, provided architectural, interior design, planning, and comprehensive engineering services for Geisinger's Hospital for Advanced Medicine.

WHAT WAS THE CLIENT'S NEED?

The hospital, which welcomed its first patients on Feb. 9, 2010, was designed to bring together specialized staff and cutting-edge technologies to care for some of the region's most critically ill



Geisinger Health Systems – Hospital for Advanced Medicine, located in Pennsylvania, is a shining example of how evidence-based design leads to better patient care.

patients – delivering complex, compassionate and convenient care to the residents of Central Pennsylvania.

The Hospital's nine stories (308,000 square feet) of flexible, patient-centered, technology-enhanced space include 12 new operating rooms in a 32,000-square-foot surgical suite, and Geisinger's Heart & Vascular Institute, where a team of cardiologists, cardiovascular surgeons, thoracic surgeons and vascular surgeons work together to offer industry-leading care.

SITE VISITS/BENCHMARKING.

As part of the design process, EwingCole led workshops with patients, nurses, physicians and staff to achieve consensus on design and operational objectives. Once it was determined that Geisinger was interested in acuity-adaptable beds, EwingCole conducted numerous site visits and benchmarking exercises to thoroughly understand why the universal model of care had failed in other institutions. This investigation showed that one major reason for failure was that the architectural plan did not coordinate with the operational/staffing plan.

COMPUTER RENDERINGS/FULL-SCALE MOCKUPS.

Getting the patient room design concept correct is critical – it is one of the single most repeated pro-

gram elements with perhaps the greatest impact on patient attitude and staff efficiency. EwingCole utilizes 3D CADD visualization tools during design to help the staff constituency groups participate in evaluating the details and dimensions that make evidence-based designs successful for patients and staff. The investment in using these tools is worthwhile when the impact of these elements on first costs and long-term operating costs is considered.

For instance, in healthcare facilities, lighting design can be a matter of life and death. A well-designed system can lead to reductions in medical errors, pain, stress, depression and length of stay. It can also aid in getting a good night's sleep. By anticipating the lighting needs of the patient and the medical staff, it is possible to reach a healthy, cost-effective and sustainable system throughout the institution.

Lighting for patient rooms creates a design challenge because lighting requirements vary for patient, family, nurse, doctor and housekeeping. Because of the variety of lighting levels required, flexibility is key. The answer: Create multiple zones of light with simple switching.

Daylight via a window is required

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NEWS

AIA introduces IgCC guide at convention

The American Institute of Architects introduced the first overview guide on how architects can implement in their practice the International Green Construction Code (IgCC), which was introduced in March by the International Code Council.

The guide, entitled simply, “Guide to the IgCC,” (www.aia.org/igcc) is meant as a one-stop-shop document exclusively for AIA-member architects working in jurisdictions where the IgCC is adopted or soon will be. The announcement was made on the opening day of the AIA’s 2012 National Convention in May.

“For architects to begin implementing and advocating for a code as far-ranging and complex as the IgCC, they need a document that covers everything about it,” said Jeff Potter, AIA president. “The IgCC Guide should be part of every architect’s client tool-kit going forward.”

Getting the IgCC adopted in all 50 states and in jurisdictions across the country is the primary mission of the ICC, which published the code in March. However, the AIA has taken a

leadership position in advocating for the code. This guide is but another initiative in the AIA’s effort to make the IgCC commonplace in the talent toolkit architects bring to the market.

“This guide is the product of countless hours of review and vetting,” said Mary Ann Lazarus, head of the AIA’s IgCC Task Force. “It is the product of weeks of input from some of the best minds at the AIA and within the profession. I know it will be of tremendous help to architects.”

Among the areas covered by the AIA’s IgCC Guide:

- A comprehensive overview of the IgCC
- A backgrounder on the IgCC’s genesis and a history of environmental advocacy by the AIA
- A closer look at energy and energy modeling
- A chapter-by-chapter summary of the IgCC
- An entire chapter on how to lobby state and local governments to adopt the IgCC.

EVIDENCE, from page 5

in all patient rooms by the FGI AIA Guidelines for Design and Construction of Hospitals and Health Care Facilities, so that the patient is oriented to the outside world – a critical element in stress reduction. The FGI guidelines also suggest lighting controls for patients so they can have some control over their environment.

Coves make the room bright and provide soft illumination; slim asymmetric exam lighting on either side of the bed – not over the bed – is desirable. A reading light/observation light may be incorporated in the headwall millwork or at the ceiling plane. Dimming may be considered if the examination lighting doubles as a reading light.

Nightlights should be provided in the patient rooms and associated toilet rooms. LED-type night lights in red/warm wavelengths are preferred for low-energy consumption, long life and appropriate low-light levels. For energy savings, occupancy sensors with integrated time of day controls can trigger on and off general lighting in toilet rooms during the day. In the evening hours, a lower level of light that comes on automatically will not shock a patient who makes a trip to the bathroom.

Before final design was documented, EwingCole and Geisinger System Services constructed two, full-scale patient room mock-ups, to “test fit” actual furnishings and to confirm:

- Staff requirements for treatments, procedure and protocols.
- Positioning of equipment, support devices and required utility connections.

POST-OCCUPANCY EVALUATIONS. The Hospital for Advanced Medicine includes two inpatient nursing units offering 60 single-occupancy rooms. Thirty of those rooms are acuity-adaptable, specifically designed and staffed to allow the patient rooms, beds and care intensity to adapt as patients progress through the healing process. This means that patients stay in one room, surrounded by the same care team, for their entire stay. Family and other visitors quickly become familiar with the facility, allowing easier and less stressful navigation.

These 30 rooms are also equipped with state-of-the-art wireless monitoring and communications systems to support the eICU Program – a technology that continuously analyzes patient condition data and alerts staff when a patient is trending toward a serious health event.

To measure the success of implanted evidence-based design solutions, EwingCole and Geisinger performed evaluations one year after occupancy to measure quantifiable results. These results are analyzed and used accordingly for future projects. At Geisinger, the post-occupancy evaluation compared patient outcomes and satisfaction of the top 10 diagnoses in the previous critical care unit to the top 10 diagnoses in the new facility. An example of measured results, where design details contribute to improved outcomes, is the lower occurrence of ventilator-assisted pneumonia. The headwall in the patient room is designed to be nearly horizontal; allowing the nurse to visually estimate the patient’s bed position and make sure it is kept at or above 30 degrees. This is known to reduce the incidence of VAP, and these results were seen at Geisinger. ▲▲

The value of IT leadership



Karl Fischer

GUEST SPEAKER

Don't underestimate what they can do for you and reward accordingly.

There's an alarming trend occurring in our industry that may not be visible to the untrained eye that is causing damaging financial and business continuity ripple effects. For firms not taking precautionary measures, the outcome is bleak: stagnant growth, less competitive client services, and a less desirable workplace. We're talking about IT leadership and vision as the can being kicked down the road.

I'll clue you in momentarily, but first, consider what your company has done in the last 10- to 15 years. Grown in revenue, by how much? Increased staff size? Opened or relocated offices; made acquisitions? Entered overseas markets; developed new service offerings? Is it not indisputable that good people were and are the primary reason for success? It should also be apparent that information technology is the fabric woven throughout every aspect of the firm that enables growth and success. Is any other area of the company benchmarked by uptime and availability of 99.999 percent? IT is!

The role of the IT leader, therefore, should be valued accordingly, because his/her vision and strategy are crucial to not only aligning the business's capabilities with client demands and expectations, but also to future competitiveness in the marketplace. With that as our backdrop, we must ask why are long tenured IT leaders, *the true architects of successful firms*, disappearing? Three reasons: economy, ego, opportunity. The A/E/P and environmental consulting industry has been severely affected by the *economy*, forcing cutbacks of mighty proportions over the last few years. Like most areas, IT was hit hard and, in several known instances, this has included cutting the IT leader. Sounds logical, right? A whole lot of overhead and if you don't have money to invest in new technology, what value is the strategic IT leader providing? The issue here is two-fold. One, these long-tenured IT leaders are typically highly adaptable and with their broad knowledge of the way a company runs are the only ones able to rapidly respond to sudden changes in strategy, client demands or anything else. Consider this; do you have a disaster recovery or business continuity plan in place? Is your IT leader a part of that? Why is that? Second, the intellectual property that goes out the door with that IT leader is unquantifiable. One thing to understand about business network infrastructures is that they are very complex and no two are the same. Only the architect can truly decipher the matrix.

Ego refers directly to the business owners and senior leaders who acknowledge the importance of "computers" but refuse to position IT as anything more than a support service for the actual "breadwinners" in the firm. I've heard plenty of business owners SAY that IT gives them a competitive advantage and is vital to their organization's success. Yet, their actions speak volumes. It is rare for an IT leader to be granted a seat at the table or a share in the ownership of the firm. I've even been told that unless your name is on the front door, there will never be any chance to get to that level. Wow, talk about ego. The firm that said this is currently suffering with many of the challenges that most of us conquered years ago because they are not allowing the IT leader to take part in the business plan and therefore have no way of getting the IT strategy aligned. One glaring example is the lack of connectivity between offices.

The industry is well served by an unquestionably passionate and loyal group of IT leaders, and it is to a firm's detriment to not recognize the strategic role they play. IT visionaries, as I am calling them, actually understand this and over the years have adapted to become agile enough to take whatever new project or responsibility comes their way: reprographics, facilities, phones, wireless. Because of this, they are in a position to learn every single facet of the firm intimately so that the technology they implement is the ultimate enabler of success. There comes a point in every career where pats on the back are no longer good enough to sustain extraordinary efforts. People need greater reward and challenge. For the long tenured IT leader that reward is ownership. They want their commitment and dedication reciprocated. There are definitely firms in our industry that recognize the value of having the IT leader on the ownership team and these firms are presenting *opportunity*. Another opportunity surfacing is with technology providers. The IT visionaries in our industry are being recruited by the vendors to provide them with a competitive differentiator.

I recently had the opportunity to spend a few days with 22 of the brightest IT leaders in this industry and there is no doubt that their firms are better for having them around. Consider the explosion of consumer technology: cloud services, GPS, 4G, mobile field applications, etc. Who is going to ensure that your firm is leveraging technology to empower your people? Do not undervalue the importance of IT leadership! ▲▲

KARL FISCHER is a board member and the Treasurer for AEC IT Leaders Organization, Inc. and a key advocate for information technology in the AEC industry. Contact him at kfischer@fuzeits.com.

Working too much?



Gerri King

GUEST SPEAKER

This article asks questions. The answers are with the reader.

Do your work habits support an ideal, healthy lifestyle or do they symbolize a life that is not in balance?

It's a hard question for most people to answer. Hard work is socially and professionally supported. It's admired, revered and rewarded. But there's a fine line between hard work and overwork or compulsion, and knowing where that line should be drawn is not easy.

One useful criterion is the "stress factor." Stress is not merely a result of hard work. Stress results from the gap between working hard and not accomplishing what we want or need to accomplish. On a day when we exert our best efforts and complete the "to do" list, we might feel tired but not stressed. When we work hard and don't complete our list, we're both tired and stressed. Similarly, we may experience stress when we work hard and achieve our professional goals, but aren't able to attend to other important areas of our lives.

A perfectionist (one who strives for a level of excellence that may be realistically unachievable) rarely feels satisfied because the stakes continue to increase and the ultimate accomplishment continually moves just beyond reach. Stress levels remain high because there's an ongoing gap between effort and achievement.

So, if we're working too much, can we change? Of course, but some important questions have to be answered first. Do our work habits provide excuses to avoid other areas of our lives? Have unnecessary work patterns become habitual? Are we working solely to please others?

Our behavior, even that which is destructive, obviously benefits us in some way or we wouldn't engage in it. In the area of work, for instance, it may be tied to financial, self-esteem, identity, logistical, and a myriad of other gains.

When we decide to effect a change, we can expect to experience some transition anxiety. Though

we may substitute healthier alternatives, we have to remember that with every gain there is a loss. Transitions are made easier when we acknowledge the tradeoffs and mourn the disappearance of our usual patterns. Change is stressful regardless of whether it's positive or negative.

Once we appreciate our reasons for resisting, then we need to look at our work patterns and list both their positive and negative effects. Ask these questions: What and whom are we neglecting? Where is the toll being taken? Are we endangering our emotional health, our bodies, or our relationships? Some may appear on both lists. For instance, though we may think we're enjoying ourselves, important people in our lives may observe that we're not.

If our assessment concludes that change is absolutely necessary, why might it not happen? Certainly for the reasons previously mentioned, but there may also be other explanations. For example: why does a person consistently compromise her/his diet, exercise, personal habits, and health even though the value of taking good care of our bodies is obvious? Maybe it requires a painful reorganizing of priorities, or maybe a list of health goals has been identified that can't realistically be met. If the existing behavior continues, physical health may not be as important as professed. Otherwise, we would be doing something about it, because choices are more often within our control than outside of it.

There are situations where we seem to have little choice, like making a commitment based on certain expectations, but one that now requires more time and energy than anticipated. At the moment, meeting that commitment may be a higher priority than taking care of ourselves, so for a time we're out of balance. That's understandable. However, if this "unusual circumstance" happens often and is really a life pattern, then there is an underlying issue requiring attention.

I believe we don't necessarily need help in finding solutions because we often know what they are. Where we do need help is in finding the strength to effect those solutions. Whatever we need to do interpersonally and whatever support we need from others, is worth pursuing. It may be a challenge, but it is also true that optimism comes from realizing that positive change is possible and, if we want it badly enough, very probable.

This article asks the questions. The answers are with the reader. And, if you are in a position to influence your professional environment, you may have an obligation to help others, as you help yourself. ▀▲

GERRI KING, Ph.D., is a social psychologist and organizational consultant who often works with A/E firms. She is president of Human Dynamics Associates of Concord, N.H.

Do our work habits provide excuses to avoid other areas of our lives? Have unnecessary work patterns become habitual? Are we working solely to please others?

BEYOND BENEFITS

Dedication to a better-built environment

Concern about sustainability and core dedication to employees distinguishes M.E. Group.

By BRYAN SULLIVAN
Correspondent

M.E. GROUP (Lincoln, NE) has a national reputation for providing energy efficient and environmentally superior design engineering services and emphasizes creating innovative, sustainable design for all its projects. The firm has seven satellite offices and a total of 69 employees.

When its doors first opened in 1982, founder, president and firm principal, Ravi Maniktala, had already been advocating for sustainable building practices since the 1970s.

Since those early days, M.E. GROUP has continued to grow steadily; now it's a multi-office company with a national and international client roster. And, through each economic cycle, the firm has remained strong through a balanced portfolio of public and private clients – further stabilized through varied geographic markets. This positive growth has been possible because the firm's philosophy is to provide the best possible work environment necessary to achieve its goals. M.E. GROUP was *ZweigWhite's* No. 9 "Best Firm to Work For" in the multidiscipline architecture and engineering services category in 2011.

Maniktala grew up in India in an environment where power outages were the norm. It was this experience that helped him embrace an appreciation for the significance of energy conser-

vation; this, in turn, organically helped create the growing community of professionals who share a passion for energy conservation.

WHY IS M.E. GROUP A TOP FIRM TO WORK FOR? Debbie Swanson, corporate secretary and director of HR who has been with the firm for 30 years, says that management is very conscious of providing a comfortable and motivational environment for people to work.



Debbie Swanson,
Corporate
Secretary and
Director of HR,
M.E. GROUP.

"As we all know, this is far from an exact science. There's no secret formula that satisfies all," Swanson says. "Our approach incorporates a large variety of incentives that encourage people to feel rewarded in a way that shows respect to them and their families in addition to outside work interest."

Actual incentives include contribution to a gym membership, educational opportunities, flexible working hours/environments, opportunities to engage in internal activities that encourage interaction as a group, and more.

"What we believe injects that extra spark to an individual is that we treat each employee on a case-by-case basis," Swanson says. "One person may be motivated only by money. Another may appreciate personal recognition for a job well done. One employee may work harder if there is a drive to gain equity in the business or a promotion and a new mother may feel she needs flexibility to adjust working hours and accommodate family schedules. The true

answer is a willingness to listen and understand different life circumstances, adapt accordingly and encourage a positive attitude. In return, M.E. GROUP benefits from a higher level of enthusiasm, reflected in a higher quality of work."

M.E. GROUP's perks/benefits are some of the most comprehensive in the industry.

"These perks and benefits are great recruiting tools when trying to bring new employees to our firm and I am proud to present them to prospective candidates," Swanson says.

AN ENGINEER'S POINT OF VIEW. Marcel Harmon, senior associate/applied anthropologist, has been with M.E. GROUP for almost five years.

He believes that this firm is top in its class.

"I really enjoy the flexibility that M.E. GROUP allows for when we're in the office," Harmon says. "As a parent of school-aged children, being able to adjust when I come in or leave the office, work from home if I have to, or make up additional time on the weekend, is a real plus."

REGULAR INTERACTION AIDS IN RETENTION. Recruiting talented employees is only half the battle when trying to create a great work environment and a winning firm. Retaining them is essential.

"We feel strongly that ongoing interaction with staff maintains a level of understanding and keeps a finger on the pulse of morals," Swanson says. "There are 26 members who have been employed by the firm for more than five years; six have been with us for more than 30 years. This type of dedication and commitment stems from comfortable and progressive working conditions and is a testimony to traditions and values inherent within the firm."

"Our approach incorporates a large variety of incentives that encourage people to feel rewarded in a way that shows respect to them and their families in addition to outside work interest."

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ON THE MOVE

SKELLY AND LOY HIRES: Skelly and Loy (Harrisburg, PA), an engineering and environmental consulting firm, has hired **Robert Kowalczyk** to work in the firm's geo-environmental services group.

An environmental engineer with more than 33 years of experience, Kowalczyk has expertise in facility compliance evaluations and managing Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act (CERCLA) pre-remedial projects, including site inspections and remedial projects such as remedial investigations/feasibility studies, remedial design, and remedial action oversight. Kowalczyk also has experience with road construction projects including conducting environmental studies to identify properties considered environmental concerns, investigations to identify areas of soil and groundwater contamination, preparing remedial action work plans and soil reuse plans, and preparing environmental plans and specifications for the design portion of transportation projects.

IDG HIRES 11: Integrated Design Group (Boston, MA) an architectural, engineering and planning firm focused on data center design, announced that it has added 11 members to its Boston and Dallas offices. New employees join the architectural, engineering, and project management groups.

In Boston, added to the architectural staff are **Luis Cetrangolo**, associate and architect; **James Highum**, architect; **Travis Blake**, designer; **Mohanned Iskanderani**, co-op; and **Courtney Newhouse**, co-op. **Ernest Needham**, electrical engineer, and **Alex Marshall**, co-op, join the electrical group. The project management team welcomes **Brian Rattigan**, project manager, and **Lindsay Shanley**, assistant project manager. In Dallas, IDG welcomed **Ryan Collier**, architect, and **Jason Dugas**, project manager.

"People make Integrated Design Group the unique firm that it is," said Robert Stein, principal of Integrated Design Group. "We have established a culture that promotes both an integrated team approach and individuality. It's a combination that attracts the most qualified individuals who are passionate about good design and client service."

BOWYER-SINGLETON HIRES AND REHIRES: Bowyer-Singleton (Orlando, FL), a civil engineering, transportation engineering, environmental sciences and surveying and mapping services firm, has added **Sean Gibbins**, roadway engineer, to its transportation department. Gibbins is an entry level engineer, specializing in roadway design.

Additionally, Bowyer-Singleton has rehired **Mark Jacobson**, senior project manager, **Marybeth Morin**, senior structural engineer, **Ricardo Montalvo**, civil engineer, and **Jeremy Hallick**, senior project surveyor.

LARSON & DARBY NAMES: Larson & Darby Group (Rockford, IL), a full-service architectural, engineering, interiors and technology design firm, recently named **Christopher Anderson** as a new partner.

Anderson joined the firm in 2006 and holds a master's degree in architecture and a bachelor's degree in architectural studies from

Clemson University, Clemson, S.C., and the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, Champaign, Ill., respectively.

"Chris possesses the traits we are looking for in our future leadership at Larson & Darby," said Larson & Darby President Dan Roszkowski, in a press release. "He is a creative and talented thinker and has the enthusiasm for both the profession of architecture and the future growth of Larson & Darby."

3t HIRES: 3tarchitects (Albany, NY), a design and architecture firm, announced the addition of **Beth Bobel** as its studio coordinator.

Bobel comes to 3t with more than 18 years' experience in the areas of administrative support, human resources and project management. Having worked for such firms as Zandri Construction Corp and AM Contracting, LLC, she has built up a wealth of diverse experience that is tailored to the unique needs of 3tarchitects.

Bobel holds an Associate of Applied Science degree in Secretarial Science from Hudson Valley Community College. From data tracking to website maintenance, she also possesses a range of technical skills that allow her to effectively manage a broad spectrum of projects and clients.

"Beth's experience with construction projects, closeouts, and general management make her exceptionally suited for this position," said Scott Townsend, founder and principal of 3tarchitects. "We are pleased to welcome her to 3tarchitects, and look forward to drawing on her broad knowledge and experience."

HOK CEO APPOINTED: The Construction Industry Round Table announced the election of **Patrick MacLeamy**, as national chairman for a term of one year.

MacLeamy is chairman and CEO of **HOK** (Saint Louis, MO), a global architectural design firm. A pioneer in leveraging technology and collaboration to improve design quality and efficiencies, MacLeamy has helped to inspire profound changes ensuring that the design and construction industry is making significant contributions to the 21st Century built environment and our quality of life.

"It is a tremendous honor to collaborate with my colleagues from the world's leading design and construction firms to help change the way we think and work," MacLeamy said. "We all need to work together as partners and leverage new project delivery methods to deliver better, more cost effective buildings that provide greater value for our clients."

As a founder and chairman of buildingSMART International, MacLeamy is a long-time advocate for the development of open, non-proprietary standards for data exchange in the building industry. By advancing buildingSMART initiatives within HOK, he has positioned the firm to accelerate the building community's adoption of a seamless exchange of accurate, useful information among all team members throughout the life cycle of a facility.

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FAMILY FIRST. Striving to create a culture that fosters more productivity and a friendly workplace is a positive goal to pursue.

"First, we are a family," Swanson says. "Look closer and you'll find engineers, scientists, analysts, energy consultants and people who pride themselves on the ability to simplify a team environment where successes go above and be-

yond. It's about a winning team."

LEADING BY EXAMPLE. If Maniktala was able to get in line for an opportunity to use his talents on the ultimate, most challenging new technology project, without doubt, he'd be first. Continually striving to offset building energy use and focus on load reduction through fundamentals of high performance design, he looks for every new technology design strategy that will help conserve energy – his passion for

renewable energy use is clear.

Maniktala's mentorship and ability to educate and challenge each of the firm's principals often leads them to embracing leadership and engineering proficiency. Each of them is a powerful contributor to overall staffing, business planning and progressive financial decisions, which helps unite them with the reality of day-to-day staffing needs.



PROFILE

Entry-level to CFO

Thomas Kahl shows that it can be done.

By BRYAN SULLIVAN
Correspondent

So, what does it take for an entry-level employee to rise through the ranks to CFO? According to Thomas Kahl, the newly-promoted CFO at **GEI Consultants, Inc.** (Woburn, MA), a 500-person geotechnical, environmental, water resources, and ecological science and engineering firm, it took 23 years of hard work, team-building and good strategy.

Promoted recently from his position of senior vice president and New England region manager, Kahl first started with the firm in 1989, after graduating from Tufts University with bachelor and master's degrees in civil engineering.

Only for a brief, but productive stint did Kahl leave GEI. His leave took place in 2000, when he decided to attend Cornell University to pursue an MBA in finance, which he received in 2002. Upon graduation, he quickly returned to GEI and continued to work on numerous geotechnical, environmental and water resources-related projects. In 2003, he was promoted to New England region manager – a position that included full profit and loss responsibility for the region's operations.

In April 2011, the company's 113 shareholders elected him to his fourth, two-year term on GEI's board of directors, where he also serves as the company treasurer.

"My whole career has been spent with GEI Consultants, progressing from entry-level staff engineer to project manager to regional manager to CFO," Kahl says.

In his new role of CFO, he has taken on new day-to-day responsibilities, including treasury, finance, accounting, mergers and acquisitions, and general corporate administration.

"Tom brings to this critical position proven financial skills, in-depth industry and company experience, strong practical knowledge of GEI's broad array of services, and a genuine client-first approach. He has spent the past 23 years in the shoes of GEI's staff engineers and scientists, project managers, and company leadership, working on hundreds of projects across America," says Frank Leathers, president of GEI Consultants. "Tom's operational experience, MBA in finance, and his tenure on the board of directors, including participation in the Audit and Finance Committee, have enabled him to gain vision and insight to develop the strategies needed to help advance GEI as we continue to grow in staff, geographic footprint, and service offerings."

GEI is an employee-owned consulting engineering firm with

A CANDID CONVERSATION WITH KAHL



Thomas Kahl,
CFO, GEI
Consultants, Inc.

THE ZWEIG LETTER: What major accomplishment are you most proud of since you have been CFO?

Thomas Kahl: Finding opportunities to use my operational and project experience to provide hands-on leadership and assistance with major company initiatives, including new office openings, large remote field projects, and overseas expansion.

TZL: What are your key strengths? And, what do you feel are the key strengths for an overall effective CFO?

"My whole career has been spent with GEI Consultants, progressing from entry-level staff engineer to project manager to regional manager to CFO."

TK: Strong team builder and good strategist. Because I am supported by a strong accounting team and have an extensive operational background, I can focus my efforts on integrating finance, operations, and strategy. More and more, I think A/E firms are looking for this level of contribution from a CFO to the senior management team.

TZL: How would you describe your work style?

TK: Collaborative, characterized by regular personal interaction with accounting and engineering staff. I consider the engineers and scientists within GEI to be my clients. I drill down to details when needed, but try not to micromanage.

TZL: As CFO, what are your top priorities for 2012?

TK: Implementation of new HR/payroll software, updated financial reporting, and growing finance staff and capabilities to keep ahead of operational growth.

TZL: What is your favorite part of this job?

TK: Working with people across the organization on different challenges in our various offices and business lines. We don't have people living or practicing in silos. Our people know what all of our other services can do and how they can be integrated into a job.

TZL: What do you enjoy in your spare time?

TK: Skiing, boating, history, and carpentry.

25 offices throughout the United States. Its multi-disciplined team of engineers and scientists has provided a broad range of consulting and engineering services on more than 25,000 projects in 50 states and 22 countries.

"It's an amazing place for recent college graduates to work," Kahl says. "GEI provides training, cross training and a collaborative environment."

And 23 years later, Kahl is living proof. ▀▀

TRANSACTIONS

HDR BUYS: HDR, Inc. (Omaha, NE), acquired the business of **Stetson Engineering Inc.**, a Wyoming-based firm with offices in Gillette and Riverton. Stetson Engineering Inc. specializes in design, engineering, and consulting services related to water, sewer, storm sewer, hydrology, and transportation. Financial terms of the agreement were not disclosed. The acquisition strengthens HDR's engineering expertise in Wyoming and its neighboring states.

"HDR has always seen the need to have a stronger presence in Wyoming to better serve our clients, develop new clients, and expand our services. Our long-term working relationship with Stetson Engineering made the acquisition a natural fit," said Eric Keen, HDR Engineering, Inc. president.

"Joining HDR allows us to offer more services to clients and more professional growth opportunities to employees," said Corky Stetson, Stetson Engineering Inc. president. "Just as important, HDR and Stetson Engineering share a philosophy of cultivating life-long relationships with clients."

KJWW ENGINEERING ACQUIRES: KJWW Engineering Consultants announced the acquisition of **Moore Engineers**, a 25-person MEP engineering consulting firm in Indianapolis, Ind. The Indianapolis office will change its name to Moore / KJWW Engineering Consultants to capture KJWW's national brand.

"The acquisition of Moore Engineers gives KJWW Engineering a big presence in the Indianapolis market and strengthens KJWW's dominance in the healthcare, higher education, and sports and recreation markets, the primary focus of Moore Engineers," said Paul VanDuyne, president of KJWW Engineering Consultants.

Moore Engineers has been a fixture in the Indiana building design and construction industry for 24 years. Their notable project experience includes such major buildings in Indiana as the Lucas Oil Stadium (home to the Indianapolis Colts), Bankers Life Fieldhouse (home of the Indiana Pacers), the downtown Marriott Hotel, Peyton Manning Children's Hospital and many projects within St. Vincent Health and Indiana University Health networks.

"We chose KJWW Engineering Consultants because of its strong reputation in the engineering industry, similar market focus, national recognition in sustainable design, and superior education and training programs," said Tim Moore, founder and former president of Moore Engineers. "Culturally, it was a great fit. We both share the same commitment to our clients and quality standards."

KJWW Engineering was named the 2011 Midwest Designer of the Year and is ranked among the Top 250 Design Firms and 11th among engineering firms in the U.S. The firm adds mechanical, electrical, structural, technology, acoustics, architectural lighting, and medical equipment planning to this new office, a level of systems integration not previously available from the local Indianapolis design community. The firm's expertise in geothermal technology and energy modeling brings added sustainable design capabilities to Indiana.

The addition of the Indianapolis office brings KJWW's employment to more than 450 full-time personnel in 11 offices across the U.S. and internationally. Headquartered in the Quad Cities, additional locations include Chicago and Naperville, Ill.; St. Louis, Mo.; Madison, Wis.; Des Moines and Cedar Rapids, Iowa; Kansas City, Kan.; Ahmedabad, India; and Dubai in the United Arab Emirates.

KJWW will maintain the Moore office location in Carmel, Ind. John Wilczynski, who has 20 years of experience and was a long-term employee and partner at Moore, will be the new office director for the Indianapolis office. He will be supported and assisted by Russell Birch, a project executive and fellow long-term employee and partner at Moore. All additional licensed engineers and design support staff in the Indianapolis office will be retained and will continue serving the client base developed over the past decades.

KJWW Engineering provides professional consulting engineering services in planning, design, energy modeling, BIM, construction administration, and systems commissioning. KJWW provides design solutions for energy efficiency, water conservation, visual and thermal comfort, and carbon emissions reductions to develop integrated building infrastructures.

HMC BECOMES EMPLOYEE-OWNED: HMC Architects (Irvine, CA), a 990-person planning and design firm, announced earlier this year that it has become a 100 percent employee-owned firm by launching an employee stock ownership plan (ESOP).

"It is our talented employees that set us apart at HMC," said Randy Peterson, president and CEO. "We want our employees to act and think like owners, and directly benefit from HMC's continued success as participants in the ESOP"

"This is an extremely significant business decision, and one of the boldest in our 72-year history," Peterson said.

"Most senior managers and previous owners are almost 15 years from retirement. We were already a broadly held firm and our decision to become an ESOP was a natural evolution of our culture of collaboration. The most important goal of this transition is to provide additional benefits to all HMC employees in recognition of their exemplary work on behalf of our clients while securing the future success and proud legacy of HMC Architects."

The move to ESOP does not change the management structure of the privately owned firm. The plan, which allows employees to earn stock in the firm, is designed as a long-term retirement benefit for all employees as owners.

Under the plan, all eligible employees will earn a yearly allocation of stock and their value will increase as the value of the firm increases. HMC intends to continue maintaining its 401(k) plan and encourages employees to utilize this added retirement vehicle to diversify their retirement assets.

"Employee ownership rewards staff for innovation and strong performance," Peterson said. "HMC has always valued our employees. The move will help us recruit new talent while retaining experienced and dedicated employees. All of us at HMC are very excited about the future."

FIRMS UNITE: Casaccio Architects (Havertown, PA), and **GYA Architects** (Philadelphia, PA), have turned their frequent collaboration into a permanent partnership. The new practice, **Casaccio Yu Architects**, based in Havertown, provides architectural design services for academic, religious, corporate, healthcare, senior living, library, civic, and corporate/commercial clients.

Principals Lee Casaccio and George Yu lead the Casaccio Yu Architects team of 12 architects, interior designers, and support staff.

"Casaccio Yu Architects arose from a blending of minds and hearts, values and vision, and two design practices with a shared appreciation for architecture that expresses, inspires, and celebrates our clients' missions," said Casaccio. "We will continue to use the motto Mission Driven Design to emphasize our approach."

Casaccio and Yu partnered on multiple projects before making their collaboration permanent this year, including the Spirituality/Education Conference Center at Daylesford Abbey in Paoli, Pa., and the McCaffery Lounge and Fitness Center Complex at Chestnut Hill College in Philadelphia.

"Our working relationship has always been very complementary," said Yu. "The team from GYA is honored to become a formal part of the Casaccio family and we look forward to evolving together."

Casaccio has practiced as a principal of Casaccio Architects since 1979. Yu practiced as principal of GYA for 30 years.