

## Your firm will be what you think it will be



Mark Zweig

Don't hitch your wagon to a dying horse and reach for the stars, Mark Zweig writes.

Aside from some startups, where the founders are wild optimists, most A/E and environmental firms are owned and run by sensible people. Unfortunately, that "sensibility" can sometimes be carried too far. The result is low expectations for what the firm could really be.

Your firm will be what you think it will be. For example, you may have a 10-person MEP firm right now, and can visualize the day when you'll be 25 people working out of two offices. That seems ambitious. After all, most MEP firms don't even get to 25 folks. But how did **Flack & Kurtz** or **Syska and Hennessey** ever become the giants they are? Someone there could visualize it. Somebody thought it was possible. They stretched themselves and had higher expectations about what could be possible.

In an industry that is made up of a jillion small companies, I'm convinced the reason so few emerge as significant organizations is because their owners either don't want to do it or don't believe it's possible. They have low hopes in terms of the kinds of clients they could secure, the kind of work they could do, the fees they could sell, and the financial rewards they could earn based on that.

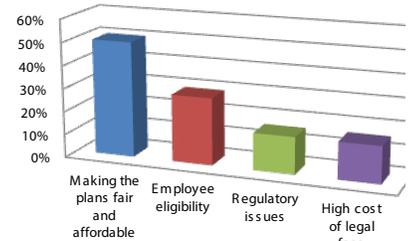
If you work in one of these companies where the owners have low aspirations, you should do some soul-searching. How much time are you willing to invest in that type of job? Better answer this question

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## TRENDLINES

### Fair and affordable



The 2012 "Incentive Compensation Survey" finds that the most common challenge firms face when creating equity-based incentive plans is making the plans fair and affordable.

Half of firms responding to the survey said they found it difficult to make their plans fair and affordable, while 29 percent found that deciding which employees are eligible was the next biggest challenge.

Meanwhile, 16 percent each of survey respondents said that dealing with regulatory issues and the high cost of legal fees were challenging.

— Margot Suydam, Survey Manager

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to your satisfaction so you don't waste too much time.

If you are one of many owners in your company and the others have what you consider to be modest expectations for themselves and the company, you, too, may need to ask yourself why you are investing your time and money in the enterprise.

In either case, you owe it to yourself and your company to first attempt to sell a more ambitious vision of the future to those who are in control. Try to get the others excited by sharing success stories of other companies in your business. Take them to meetings or events such as our upcoming Hot Firm Conference in Aspen (you don't have to be one of the 100 winning firms to attend) so they can learn from others who have overcome all the traditional constraints firms in our business face (inadequate capital, low fees, problems keeping good people, etc.).

When you get out to hire anyone in any position, look for those who have high goals and aspirations. Get enough people like that and they will force the owners and managers to up their game a bit.

Push for a new business planning process, one that starts with establishing a more ambitious future vision for the company. If the goals seem too low, squawk a little (appropriately) about how you didn't think you were hitching your wagon to a dying horse when you joined up but are beginning to rethink that.

I'd bet that if YOU have your lofty view of what's possible firmly embedded in your mind, you will find a way to get others to share it—no matter what your position is in the firm today. Use your personal power, strong will, and charisma as a force to make things happen. ▀▀

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## A/E BUSINESS NEWS

**ABI'S MODERATES:** The Architecture Billings Index pointed to a slower decline in July in design activity at U.S. architecture firms.

The American Institute of Architects reported the July ABI score was 48.7, up considerably from the mark of 45.9 in June. This score reflects a decrease in demand for design services (any score below 50 indicates a decline in billings). The new projects inquiry index was 56.3, up from mark of 54.4 the previous month.

As a leading economic indicator of construction activity, the ABI reflects the approximate nine to twelve month lag time between architecture billings and construction spending.

"Even though architecture firm billings nationally were down again in July, the downturn moderated substantially," said Kermit Baker, AIA chief economist. "As long as overall economic conditions continue to show improvement, modest declines should shift over to growth in design activity over the coming months."

Key July ABI highlights:

- Regional averages: South (52.7), Midwest (46.7) West (45.3), Northeast (44.3)
- Sector index breakdown: multi-family residential (51.4), mixed practice (49.1), commercial/industrial (48.4), institutional (46.6)
- Project inquiries index: 56.3

**DODGE INDEX UP:** The Dodge Momentum Index climbed 8.1 percent in July after retreating a revised 2.4 percent in June, according to McGraw-Hill Construction.

The Momentum Index is a monthly measure of the first (or initial) report for nonresidential building projects in planning. Combined, these projects have been shown to lead construction spending for nonresidential buildings by a full year.

The Momentum Index for July came in at 98.8 (2000=100), up from June's revised level of 91.4. This month's improvement in the Momentum Index is consistent with the latest employment report, which showed a stronger than expected increase of 163,000 jobs.

Although further increases in the index would be needed to suggest a true rebound in construction, the gain could be considered a first step in that direction.

Both the commercial and institutional components of the Dodge Momentum

Index rose in July. The institutional building segment of the Momentum Index advanced 9 percent in July after a sharp 11.2 percent decline in June.

An uptick in new planning projects for education buildings (5.8 percent) aided the gain in institutional building, although two new hospitals (one in Connecticut and one in California) dominated the projects entering planning.

The commercial building segment of the Momentum Index climbed 7.3 percent in July, even stronger than June's revised 6.7 percent improvement. Commercial building was helped by a small 2.5 percent gain in new plans for office projects. One of the projects contributing to this increase was Apple's new plan for expansion of its Austin, Texas, campus.

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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 NXPprints, please contact The YGS Group at 717-399-1900, ext. 139, or e-mail [TheZweigLetter@TheYGSGroup.com](mailto:TheZweigLetter@TheYGSGroup.com).

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## PRACTICE

# New tools; new methods; new pains

Collaborate using technology, but still maintain control.

By LIISA SULLIVAN  
Correspondent

**B**IM and IPD are all the buzz right now; in some way or another many firms are already using the technology and engaging in collaborative arrangements. However, these new ways of working are also the source of intense discussion for just about everyone in the building industry.

**WHAT IS BIM?** BIM (building information modeling) is an integrated process built on coordinated, reliable information about a project from design through construction and into operations. By adopting BIM, architects, engineers, contractors and owners can create coordinated digital design information and documentation; use that information to accurately visualize, simulate and analyze performance, appearance and cost; and reliably deliver the project faster, more economically and with reduced environmental impact. A survey of 284 design professionals by **THE ZWEIG LETTER** sister publication Structural Engineer magazine last March on their use of BIM revealed that more than half have used 3D design software on at least one project in their firms and more than half have realized benefits.

**WHAT IS IPD?** The American Institute of Architects defines IPD (integrated project delivery) as “a project delivery approach that integrates people, systems, business structures and practices into a process that collaboratively harnesses the talents and insights of all participants to optimize project results, increase value to the owner, reduce waste and maximize efficiency through all phases of design fabrication and construction.”

**MORE FOCUS AND COMMUNICATION.** **Gilbane Building Company** (Providence, RI) is one of the nation’s oldest design/build companies and is recognized as a leader in the industry; they employ approximately 2,500.

When it comes to working in a more collaborative environment and using tools like BIM design software and project delivery methods like IPD, lean champion and senior project engineer Karen Colby says that there is often better control on these projects, due to the increased focus and communication.

“And, if you involve the right people early, including the decision-makers from all parties – client team, designers, builders – you will be able to develop a shared project image,” she says.



“Early involvement of the project team and collaborative planning allow for proactive decision-making, eliminates waste and rework.”



Karen Colby,  
Senior Project  
Manager,  
Gilbane Building  
Company.

Colby adds that it’s also important to align the priorities and define what success is to this project team.

“Take the time to really understand the project drivers and set the decision-making process and all other processes accordingly. Establish shared controls and information flows, and continually evaluate and improve the process,” Colby says.

BIM execution planning is a deliberate approach to making the most of the process. Defining the value to be obtained through BIM, then establishing the tasks, deliverables, roles, responsibilities, timelines, workflows, and so on, smoothes the way.

Colby believes that BIM and IPD have improved how the industry operates. Collaborative project delivery improves project outcomes, including safety, quality, time, cost, the scope which can be obtained for the budget, and client satisfaction.

“Again, early involvement of the project team and collaborative planning allow for proactive decision-making, eliminates waste and rework,” she says.

Prefabrication enabled by BIM and collaborative teams also allows for shifting man hours off of the project site. Work can be done at a proper height, under controlled lighting and environmental conditions, and properly inspected, allowing for enhanced quality.

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“Work at height is reduced or eliminated, reducing risk and improving safety for the workers. Completed work can be delivered to the site predictably, as it is needed, and onsite congestion is reduced,” Colby says.

**CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS.**

While using BIM technology and delivering a project through IPD arrangements can result in better buildings, these processes are not straightforward.

“For example, convincing others that the results are worth the effort to try something new is a big challenge,” Colby says. “And while early involvement of teams pays off in improved project outcomes, it does shift immediate effort and costs earlier in the preconstruction phases.”

The pace and type of communication required when the project team are performing outside of their traditional roles can also be a challenge. Solution: co-locating the team in a single office.

Darren Smith, CEO, Cima Strategic Services, says that the greatest problem is thinking that you are changing behavior when using BIM.

“Scientifically, you are changing behavior, similar to changing how you build a bird’s nest or hunt, but that’s not what the industry is striving for,” he says. “IPD or collaborative project delivery is about humanistic behavior. It is about changing your heart (demeanor, manners, bearing, conduct or deportment). It’s not about the transactional aspect of the project; it’s about the relational aspect of the project.”

**PLANNING AHEAD.** So, what does the future hold for the A/E/C industry given these technology trends?

According to Autodesk, Inc., a major player in the design industry software market, there are several things to consider. They include:

- **Contracts and relationships:** The relationships of the players in an IPD team are fundamentally altered.
- **Regulation:** With the rise of integrative concepts and methods, there will be basic changes to professional standards of care and how the building process is regulated as the boundaries between design and construction become blurred.
- **Workplace:** These technologies increase

the overall flexibility and facilitate more global interaction.

- **Project process:** Traditional project phases will be adjusted and refined to accommodate an integrated project team and their project participation.
- **Education:** The curriculum at A/E schools is generally isolated. As the industry becomes more integrated, so will education.
- **Technology:** The rise of IPD will lead to a growing market for enabling technology that is aligned to advance integration throughout the building design, construction and management continuum.

**KEY INHIBITORS.** Norbert Howell, BIM manager for **Gannett Fleming** (Camp Hill, PA), an infrastructure firm that provides planning, design, technology, and construction management services, identifies two major inhibitors to implementing BIM: fear and cost.

“No one is completely comfortable with change and firms are being asked to change their processes without fully understanding what BIM is or how it affects their projects, thus the ‘fear factor’ or fear of change,” he says. “An understanding and sharing of this knowledge with everyone in the firm involved with a BIM implementation can go a long way in getting people back into their comfort zone. The cost is certainly the other factor that inhibits implementing BIM, especially in today’s economy. In addition to the software cost, a firm usually has to invest in new hardware and training. These costs, along with a decrease in productivity due to the learning curve, can certainly be a damper to implementing BIM. But if you know this going in and you plan for it, implementing BIM doesn’t have to be as painful.”

**MORE WORK NEEDS TO BE DONE.** While IPD and BIM are upon us, there are still some key issues that need to be addressed and overcome. Greater awareness and industry initiatives are critical to the widespread adoption of new delivery methods.

“BIM has also moved beyond mechanical coordination and clash detection to encompass visual scheduling, logistics planning, visualization and mockups, design and energy studies, and facility management among the ever-evolving uses,” Colby says. “Therefore, really understanding the requirements and value, and building a collaborative team are keys to success.” ■▲

**RESOURCES**

**FEE & BILLING SURVEY:** If your goal is to price your firm’s services competitively without losing your shirt, then you need to know what firms just like yours are charging for the same types of services.

ZweigWhite’s “Fee & Billing Survey of Architecture, Engineering, Planning & Environmental Consulting Firms” is the standard guideline for architecture, engineering, planning, and environmental firms looking to find the balance between competitive pricing, quality design, and firm profitability. Since 1998, thousands of firm leaders just like you have relied on the rock-solid data in this comprehensive report.

The 2012 edition of the “Fee & Billing Survey” includes the latest available data (collected in the spring of 2012) on fee structures for every major market type, billing rates and chargeability statistics for 27 levels of employee (from clerks up through principals), ways firms usually charge for subconsultant fees and reimbursable expenses, how firms collect payment, and much more. Don’t make another decision about your firm’s fees and contracts without first seeing this book!

In addition to helping you set fees, billing rates, and other contract details internally, this book is also a great tool to show clients or potential clients.

For more information or to buy a copy call 800-466-6275 or log on to [www.zweigwhite.com/zw-1147.aspx](http://www.zweigwhite.com/zw-1147.aspx).

**HIGH PROFIT FIRM SURVEY:** Even during the recent economic downturn, there are firms in the A/E industry that still report increasing profits. How do the high-profit architecture, engineering, and environmental consulting firms do business? What are they doing that you’re not?

Find out with the “2011-2012 High Profit Firm Survey of Architecture, Engineering, Planning & Environmental Consulting Firms.” This publication covers every area of management for leaders of design and environmental firms. Whether you want answers to questions on financial performance, marketing, information technology, project management, compensation, billing practices, or other issues, you’ll find it all in this one report.

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## SURVEY

# Nurturing the human component

Growing firms discuss ways they keep their most valuable asset – employees – motivated.

By CHRISTINA ZWEIG  
Contributing editor

The secret to the success of design firms: motivated, productive people doing high-quality work in sectors that are growing. Yet, whenever times get tough, the first things to get cut are often the incentives that keep good employees going.

According to ZweigWhite's "2012 Incentive Compensation Survey," median incentive compensation spending by A/E/P and environmental firms as a percentage of total payroll has seen a steady decline since 2006, going from a median of 10.3 percent to 2012's reported figure of 5 percent. Less than half of firms (39 percent) predict an increase in incentive compensation spending in 2012, a 10 percent rise from 2011.

The survey found a very clear correlation between profit, growth and the desire/ability to reward employees. Incentive compensation as a percentage of net service revenue was highest in fast-growth companies, at 10.5 percent, the survey said. Stable firms reported a median of 2.5 percent and firms experiencing a decline reported only 1.9 percent. Very high profit firms spent a median of 15.8 percent of net service revenue on incentive compensation, high profit firms spent 7.5 percent, average profit firms spent 2.9 percent, and low profit/loss firms spent a meager 1.5 percent.

**MAKING CHOICES.** With so many different types of incentive compensation plans to choose from, the survey asked firm leaders which plans they have found to be the most successful. While cash and monetary rewards are generally the most common types of incentive compensation, they're not neces-

sarily the best or only option.

Firms report in the survey that their most successful incentive compensation plans are performance bonuses (55 percent) and profit sharing (23 percent).

Alternative forms of incentive compensation were found by 12 percent of firms to be more motivating to employees than cash or monetary awards – time off, appreciation, recognition and company outings are some of the most common motivators.

**CONSIDERABLE EFFORT.** Paul Greenhagen, CEO at **Westwood Professional Services** (Eden Prairie, MN), a 230-person multidiscipline firm on the 2012 Hot Firm list, has put forth considerable effort to build a company culture that values employees and keeps them motivated.



Paul Greenhagen,  
CEO,  
Westwood  
Professional  
Services.

"Like other successful firms, we've made it through some challenging economies. But what I think makes us distinguishable as a Hot Firm is the innate desire of each of our employees to be the best they can be," Greenhagen says. "We could not be as successful as we are without the people we have hired. We make it a point to hire and retain people who understand the importance of supporting each other's roles, genuinely enjoy their work, and are willing to share their good fortune."

**EMPLOYEE HAPPINESS.** "Our project managers and teams are really passionate about providing great service to our clients. It is important that we feed that passion, so we focus on enabling them with the resources, processes and tools to focus on the things they do best," Greenhagen says. "We want our employees to be happy. When they are happy, our company and clients bene-

fit, as well as the employee. We spend a lot of time together, so another big part of our culture is to find ways to smile and have some fun."

Greenhagen also believes that giving employees the right tools is an important part of keeping everyone going.

"The past year has been full of positive change," he says. "We've turned our focus onto aligning our internal operations with our overall business strategies so that we can further enable our people to respond to clients faster and most effectively. We are working on refining our processes and putting tools and technologies in place which will allow us to do our jobs better."

Since the firm has expanded across the country and in all of their markets, internal collaboration has also become a bigger issue and is a top priority for Westwood. "We want to stay as one team as we grow, so our top initiatives include process improvement and enhanced communications. To be the best company, we understand that we need to focus on supporting the passion of our people to be their best and satisfied in their work," Greenhagen says.

Ted Rowe, president of **MTE Consultants Inc.** (Kitchener, ON), a 197-person civil engineering, structural engineering, land surveying, environmental science and toxicology firm on the Hot Firm list for the fourth time, says, "While MTE has not been immune to the economic downturn, we have managed to continue to grow our gross revenue over the past three years. This is in large part due to the commitment of our staff to a high level of customer service."

To keep staff going, and the firm growing, MTE has focused on a variety of development and education programs. "In 2012, MTE has been focusing on advancing our leadership development programs, along with our ongoing commitment to staff training and development. We feel that as we grow our people, we grow as a firm," Rowe says. ▲▲

# Creating a mentorship program



Gerri King

GUEST SPEAKER

What does it mean, who benefits, and what are the responsibilities?

**T**he mentoring partnership is an agreement between two people to share experiences and expertise in order to help with the personal and professional growth of the person being mentored.

Though supervisors obviously mentor their supervisees, this is not what we're talking about here. In a formal mentorship program, the pairings are outside of the traditional supervisory relationship so that the employee is assured that whatever s/he brings up will not affect her or his performance evaluation.

If possible, the partnership should be separate from the chain of command to ensure an open and honest dialogue. It works best if there are at least two grade levels between them, but a partnership can also be comprised of folks who are at the same grade level and even a veteran employee whose status is below the mentee's, if the discussion is focused on specific areas of expertise that are held by an employee at any level.

What does it mean to be a mentor?

- 1) Mentors need to have the desire to share what they have learned during their careers.
- 2) Mentors must be willing to spend time with the mentee to develop a good working relationship that is trusting and honest.
- 3) Good mentors must be able to offer a reality check when necessary.
- 4) They must be willing to work with the mentee to develop an individual career development plan in order for her or him to achieve short- and long-term goals.
- 5) This is the tough one: they should be willing to share their failures as well as their successes. It is sometimes said that the benefit of a mentoring relationship is to help someone learn from mistakes without having to experience them.

How does the mentor benefit?

- 1) Mentors get a chance to pass on their institutional wisdom.
- 2) Mentors have an opportunity to practice their interpersonal and management skills outside the usual hierarchical relationship.
- 3) Mentors often become recognized as positive role models and are sometimes sought out by others.
- 4) Many find that being in a mentoring partnership helps them expand their own horizons and keeps them in

touch with what's going on in other areas of the organization.

- 5) Mentors often insist that they gain as much, if not more, from the mentoring partnership than their mentee does.

What are the mentee's responsibilities?

- 1) Mentees must be willing to learn.
- 2) They must be able to accept constructive feedback.
- 3) Mentees must be willing to "stretch" and try new things and take risks.
- 4) They must be able to identify short and long-range career goals and accept that those goals may change.

What does the mentee get out of it?

- 1) Everyone is ultimately responsible for her or his own career, but it can be very helpful to have someone to talk to who can provide a listening ear and share what has helped him or her over the years.
- 2) Mentors can provide valuable direction and clarification at times of confusion or doubt.
- 3) Mentors can help mentees figure out what they need to do to fill in the gaps between where they are now and where they want to be in the future.
- 4) Mentors can provide alternative perspectives.

What are the different types of mentoring?

- 1) Natural mentoring** is when one person is casually talking with another and the conversation helps move him or her forward.
- 2) Situational mentoring** is usually short-lived and happens for a specific purpose because something has come up that requires consultation.
- 3) Supervisory mentoring** is that gained from one's supervisor. It is very important, but there are some drawbacks: 1) the supervisor may not be a "subject matter expert" on the topic at hand; 2) supervisors are often very busy and they may not be able to devote equal time to all supervisees; and 3) some people are not comfortable exhibiting vulnerabilities in front of their supervisors for fear that it will negatively affect their performance evaluations.

- 4) Formal mentorship programs are the focus of this article.

Reviewing the mentoring relationship

- 1) Plan to commit to a one-year partnership. It takes a while to develop the trust and rapport necessary to begin working on identifying goals and an action plan to achieve them.

See GERRI KING, page 8

# The blunder of biases



Jeremy Clarke

SEARCH SAVVY

When the competition snaps up the person you bypassed due to your prejudices, you'll end up looking dumb.

One of the more interesting aspects of being a recruiting consultant is that I have the opportunity to speak to a wide variety of firms; each of them coming in various shapes and sizes, in various locations and offering their own unique slate of services. I appreciate every engagement because each one offers a unique window into the firm's culture, values, priorities, operational strategies, etc. And on every engagement my "peek" into these cultural nuances brings a renewed appreciation for those firms that approach recruitment with a robust sense of objectivity, integrity and fairness.

In over 15 years of recruiting, I've come to the unmistakable realization that the values of a firm are made evident, to a significant extent, by the attributes they seek for, and ascribe worth to, in the evaluation of candidates and selection of employees. The virtue of a firm is directly proportionate to the attributes they hold most dear in their prospective employees, assuming all other technical requirements for a given position are met.

Now, this may seem like a rather obvious moral assertion, but if my observation is true, then I submit that there are many firms transgressing the obvious. Some readers might object that assertion. I understand that. Nonetheless, it is a worthwhile query to ask, "Do I find myself leaning significantly toward external preferences in my selection of a candidate?" If your answer to that question is "Yes," then allow me to reaffirm your position among the human race. If you answered "No," well, I'm afraid that my encouragements in this article will not apply to you.

A "yes" answer is, of course, an honest answer. The question for us then becomes, "Knowing that you and I are stricken with this predisposition for

external biases, how do we mitigate it in our selection process?" How do I set forth an objective, equitable selection process? It's not my intention to offer you some corrective methodology (Do you really need another methodology?), so let me just appeal to some basic human sensibilities.

■ **Inequity in selection is illegal.** This one's not complicated. USA Labor Department guidelines render it illegal to discriminate against candidates/applicants on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, age, national origin, etc. Anyone who has been hiring for any length of time is familiar with this mandate. I'm not so naïve as to suggest that a legal proclamation on my part is going to bring about hiring reform. If there is anything that characterizes the human experience, it is that you simply cannot legislate morality. So I'll make another appeal...

■ **Inequity in selection is a strategic blunder.** A predisposition toward/against external attributes will eventually affect your firm's position and performance negatively. I've worked with firms that have made statements like this: "We'd like you to find us a principal – someone who is female, attractive, 30-40 years of age, and preferably not Caucasian." I'm totally serious. The reason for these preferences rests in the hope that these external characteristics will somehow bring added merit to the firm by virtue of the more pleasing or relevant "presence" the employee would bring to would-be clients.

Let's just consider the ramifications of this for a moment: When a firm limits the scope of candidates to those possessing these non-essential characteristics, what they have in essence predetermined is that external merit weighs more heavily than professional/personal merit and in doing so they radically diminish the available candidate pool and, consequently, forfeit candidates who may have brought the strongest professional/technical merit to the opportunity. That's really the bottom shelf. It happens all the time.

Here's my appeal: Take a moment to review one of your position descriptions. What are the key characteristics stipulated? Are they representative of the long term, strategic interests of your firm? Do they express your firm's conviction that competitive candidates should bring the necessary competencies that ultimately serve to progress your firm's position and performance in the marketplace? Well, of course they do! My question then is: Why on earth would you preeminently screen and select candidates by way of subordinate and lesser external characteristics? Why aren't the key professional competencies of the position the preeminent focus of your search? You only limit your firm's performance potential when

In over 15 years of recruiting, I've come to the unmistakable realization that the values of a firm are made evident, to a significant extent, by the attributes they seek for, and ascribe worth to, in the evaluation of candidates and selection of employees.

See JEREMY CLARKE, page 8

EVENTS

# Hot Firm agenda announced

Event jam-packed with CEO sessions and expert advice.

**THE ZWEIG LETTER** 2012 Hot Firm Conference agenda will focus strongly on the people who placed these businesses among the fastest growing firms in the A/E/P and environmental consulting industry.

The conference, scheduled for Oct. 24 and 25 at the St. Regis Resort in Aspen, Col., will include at least a half-dozen sessions and roundtables with CEOs from the 100 fastest growing firms in the United States and Canada. CEOs will tackle topics such as growth and leadership, among others.

The conference will also include numerous sessions with experts on topics ranging from mergers and acquisitions to choosing who should be on the board of directors or how to balance work and life for high octane CEOs.

Specifically, at this year's conference CEOs of the 2012 Hot Firms will be featured in a series of presentations where

they will answer questions like these:

Questions about growth

- 1) Did you create a specific plan for your firm's growth?
- 2) How much of your recent fast growth has been organic or by acquisitions?
- 3) What are the factors that contributed to your firm's growth?

Questions about leadership

- 1) What do you think is the most important thing you do as firm leader and how has that contributed to your firm's growth?
- 2) As CEO you sometimes need to make very difficult decisions. What resources have you sought out to give you guidance?
- 3) What was the worst business decision you ever made and what did you do to resolve it?
- 4) What actions did you take in 2008 to keep your company growing in the face of a crashing economy?

To view the full agenda for the 2012 Hot Firm Conference, log on to [www.hotfirm.com](http://www.hotfirm.com) and click on the "pro-

gram" tab. To register for the event, click on the "register" tab.

**ABOUT THE HOT FIRM. THE ZWEIG LETTER** Hot Firm Conference, held by ZweigWhite, is an annual event that is all about how to achieve success in the A/E/P and environmental consulting industry.

The conference has been held every October since the year 2000 and is a way to celebrate both firms that have made **THE ZWEIG LETTER** Hot Firm List, and those that want to get there.

Every year, ZweigWhite recognizes the fastest-growing architecture, engineering, planning, and environmental consulting firms with **THE ZWEIG LETTER** Hot Firm List. Over the years, the "Hot Firm" designation has become synonymous with success in the industry.

In 2012, **THE ZWEIG LETTER** Hot Firm List consists of 100 finalists. Rankings will be announced during the Hot Firm Conference black tie awards celebration dinner Oct. 25. ▀▲

For more information visit [www.hotfirm.com](http://www.hotfirm.com).

**JEREMY CLARKE**, from page 7  
you introduce this kind of bias into your search.

There's nothing wrong with having diversity initiatives. In many cases the government mandates it in federal contracts. Further, there may be some practical interests associated with preferring a female over a male, as an example, or vice-versa. We're talking about something else entirely different here and I see it play out all the time. When a search begins, candidates begin hitting the radar are immediately viewed through the grid of some external bias and subsequently dismissed. In most cases the firm is totally ignorant of the candidate's ability because they never even engaged the candidate in a discussion. Who suffers? Well, you could argue that the candidate suffers. But, believe me, if they are a strong

candidate, a smarter competitor firm that does not share your biases will scoop them up.

So, who suffers? Ultimately, your firm suffers because you've deferred advantage to your competition by forfeiting the superior candidate. Inequitable, immoral and just plain dumb. Commit to focusing on key competencies and your hiring accuracy, your reputation in the marketplace, and your conscience will all improve. Furthermore, you'll send a clear message to your employees about your firm's integrity. The values of a firm are made evident, to a significant extent, by the attributes they seek, and ascribe worth to, in the evaluation of candidates and selection of employees. ▀▲

JEREMY CLARKE is the director of executive search consulting with ZweigWhite. Contact him at [jjclarke@zweigwhite.com](mailto:jjclarke@zweigwhite.com).

**GERRI KING**, from page 6

- 2) Plan to discuss a "no-fault" termination clause, in which either party can back out if it's not working for her or him.
- 3) Plan to have a six-month check in to evaluate how it's evolving for each person.
- 4) Monitor the necessary training needs that emerge and make them happen on a systemic level.

The most knowledgeable people are not necessarily the most communicative. Mentorship training programs help discover who is best suited to the role and will provide them the techniques and skills to fulfill the requirements. It also should include a thoughtful process of how to best pair mentors and mentees. ▀▲

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.

## BEST FIRM 2012

# What does it mean to the winners?



TOP LEFT: Bracken Engineering Inc. makes an employee outing to Disney World one of their hallmarks. TOP RIGHT: GATE, Inc. is proud of giving to charity. BOTTOM RIGHT: In the annual CANstruction event, Bowers + Kubota employees unite their brains and imaginations to recreate a scene from the Wizard of Oz out of canned food.

## Singular focus on employees distinguishes Best Firms over and over.

Editor's note: This is the second of a two-part article covering the 2012 Best Firms To Work For rankings.

By BRYAN SULLIVAN  
Correspondent

Each year, ZweigWhite announces the winners of the “Best Firms to Work For” rankings. These firms inspire their teams to perform at the highest levels by creating an environment where employees feel valued, where they feel like they make a difference and where they can clearly see their contribution to the overall mission and success of the firm. Creating such a work environment attracts the brightest and the best in each of the fields represented by these awards.

So, we asked some of the winning firms what these awards meant to them. Here is what they had to say:

**Bowers + Kubota Consulting** (Oahu, HI), a 120-person engineering and architecture firm focuses on project and construction management. The firm also has a strong architectural design section with nine architects, coming in at No. 1 in the Best Civil Engineering Firms Tow Work For category.

Brian Bowers, president, says that this award is validation that it is providing proper leadership and creating a culture where the team can succeed.

“This award is a source of great pride and motivation for our entire team,” he says. “It sets a very high standard for us so that we are inspired to seek continuous improvement.”

“While we are humbled by being selected, we are equally interested in benchmarking our firm against other best firms to see where we can improve our policies, practices and procedures. For example, while attending the 2010 ‘Best Firms to Work For’ summit, we were convinced that we needed to hire a full-time HR manager, which we did in November 2010. And, during the 2011 summit, we were intrigued by a presentation on mentoring. Because of this, we made implementing a formal mentoring program in 2012 a top HR priority. This was launched in July. It is this type of insight that we expect to gain from participating in this competition,” Bowers says.

Finally, Bowers says that this award is also a source of inspiration to know that its team supports the firm’s vision for the future.

See BEST FIRM, page 10

## ON THE MOVE

**SSE HIRES: Kris Bauman**, formerly president of Bauman Company, LLC of Newtown, Pa., and senior vice president of development at the Gale Real Estate Services Company of Roseland, N.J., has joined **Sam Schwartz Engineering, PLLC** (New York, NY) as its executive vice president and chief operating officer.

Bauman has over 30 years of broad-based experience in the fields of construction and real estate. He has completed the development of various leading retail, office, and industrial projects throughout the greater New York and New Jersey market area.

Bauman has developed over 4.5 million square feet of warehouse and Class A corporate office space, \$200 million of property purchases and sales, and has positioned best-in-class development projects nationwide.

Most recently, Bauman led the development team on behalf of The Rockefeller Group Development Corporation for the Green at Florham Park, which is now home to the New York Jets and to the North American headquarters of German chemical giant BASF.

SSE specializes in developing context-sensitive transportation solutions for simple to complex projects regionally, nationally and abroad.

**exp HIRES: Jamie Awford** has been appointed executive vice president of U.S. operations for **exp** (Brampton, ON), a global engineering firm. **Paul Gibson** has been named executive vice president and practice leader for building engineering, company-wide. Awford and Gibson will both be based in San Diego.

With more than 20 years of relevant industry experience, Awford's operational leadership within several large U.S.-based organizations

has resulted in significant firm revenue growth. Most recently, he was vice president of **Balfour Beatty's** Southwest region, where he directed business development, pre-construction services and contract negotiations for large-scale projects.

"Jamie's strong background is well suited to help advance our business objectives in the U.S.," said Jeff Kishel, president and CEO of **exp**. "His industry knowledge, organizational and sales leadership, and technical expertise, will drive **exp's** continued growth in the U.S."

Having most recently served as executive vice president for the U.S. eastern and western regions; Gibson has led day-to-day regional operations for the firm, spearheading the growth of **exp's** building's practice.

**GENSLER HIRES: Gensler** (San Francisco, CA), the world's largest architectural firm, has named **Glenn MacCullough** as the firm's Southeast Region leader for the Sport + Recreation practice area.

MacCullough brings considerable experience to his new role at Gensler, having focused on sports and recreation design for more than two decades.

Past notable projects include the Washington Nationals Baseball Park Interiors, the District of Columbia Natatorium renovation, the Texas Rangers Baseball Park in Arlington, Texas, Walt Disney's Wide World of Sports in Orlando, Fla.; and early design studies for American Airlines Arena in Dallas.

"Glenn's appointment will allow us to offer our sports and recreation clients greater depth of expertise and experience. His leadership will support this expanding practice in exciting projects on the horizon," said Jeff Barber, Gensler D.C. managing director.

## BEST FIRM, from page 9

"After all, we cannot be complacent – if you are not moving forward, you are moving backwards," Bowers says.

**Bracken Engineering Inc.** (Tampa, FL), a multi-discipline firm with 29 full-time employees and eight part-time employees, was the No. 3 Best Structural Engineering Firm To Work For in 2012 – the third time they have placed on the top 10.

"Our firm received this award because the people within our firm have worked to make it one of the best engineering companies in the country to work for," says William Bracken, president. "Their commitment to our mission statement has created an environment truly worthy of the distinction."

Bracken believes that this recognition will not only have a positive effect on the firm's future, but also help make improvements among employees.

"With each year, we learn from the survey results, and respond to employee input to improve our work processes as well as our work environment," Bracken says. "And it's these constant improvements that serve to set us apart from our competitors. In turn, this award becomes a recruiting tool that helps us to create continued growth in challenging times."

**GATE, Inc.** (Houston, TX) provides design, technical support and project management services to oil and gas companies in the U.S and overseas, with a particular focus on the design and commissioning of deepwater floating production

systems operating in water depths of 3,000 feet or more. The firm was No. 1 in the Best Multidiscipline Firms To Work For in 2012.

Lee Jordan, operations manager GATE, explains that this award means a lot to them.

"The award raises our visibility when we are recruiting as it is an unbiased evaluation of the type of work environment that we provide," he says. "In addition to helping us attract experienced hires within the industry, this is of great benefit for our graduate recruitment program as it separates us from other companies seeking similar talent that may otherwise be larger and more well-known than we are."

GATE started in 2000, and from day one the firm commitment to be a "Best Firm to Work For."

"It is something that is strongly imprinted in the DNA and culture of the company," Jordan says. "Our employees expect it and so it is something that everyone strives for and pulls together to achieve. As a result, there is no tolerance at any level of the organization to settle for things being 'good enough' rather than the best that they can be."

GATE is very proud to have received the award, which serves as validation of the effort put in by management and staff to truly live up to the vision upon which the firm was founded.

"However, it is now also a challenge and rallying point to ensure that as the company grows, we are able to maintain the level of staff development and satisfaction that we currently benefit from," Jordan says. ▀▴

## PROFILE

# Tailor-made role for problem solver

Healthy backlog and expenditures are this CFO's top priorities.

By BRYAN SULLIVAN  
Correspondent

Roy Mitchell was first attracted to working with **McDonough Bolyard Peck, Inc.** (Fairfax, VA) when he learned that there was the opportunity to grow into a CFO role. He was comfortable with this having worked as controller at his last firm, a government contractor in the Washington, D.C. area.

On Aug. 11, 2010, the leadership at the 270-person multi-disciplined construction consulting firm appointed Mitchell, as CFO. The prior CFO had moved onto another company and Mitchell was referred to MBP through a local executive level staffing agency.

Today, he is responsible for overseeing a variety of finance-related projects that include accounts payable and receivable activities, general ledger, financial reporting and company audits.

"I manage the finance, accounting and forecasting functions for the firm," Mitchell says. "I also prepare and present the financial performance results to senior management and owners. I interface with operational leadership and manage the annual financial audit and valuation engagements."

And, as with any firm, a healthy work backlog and controlled expenditures are the keys to being a successful business.

**A TRUSTED RELATIONSHIP.** Firm leaders are confident in Mitchell's abilities to help steer it into a sound future.

"We are excited to have Roy at MBP as our CFO," says Charles Bolyard, chairman of the board and CEO of MBP. "Roy's extensive experience in accounting makes him a valuable asset to our corporate team."

As CFO, Mitchell brings nearly 20 years of experience specializing in government contract accounting with a solid background in project management and the implementation of multiple financial accounting systems. He holds a bachelor's degree in business administration with a major in accounting from Marymount University. ▲▲

### A CONVERSATION WITH ROY MITCHELL



Roy Mitchell,  
CFO, McDonough  
Bolyard Peck, Inc.

**THE ZWEIG LETTER: What major accomplishments are you most proud of since being appointed CFO at MBP?**

**Roy Mitchell:** I have had the opportunity to build a wonderful, cohesive accounting team. We are the epitome of teamwork and customer service – qualities that I value greatly and that integrate into MBP's values-based organization.

**TZL: What are your key strengths? What do you feel the key strengths are for an effective CFO?**

**RM:** Problem solving, strong communication and the drive and ability to work hard.

**TZL: How would you describe your work style?**

**RM:** I am usually hands-off (not a micromanager), unless the situation warrants otherwise. I like to lead by example, coach and mentor my team.

**TZL: What are your top priorities for 2012?**

**RM:** Our objective as a whole is to continue to ensure that we are conservative in our expenditures and that our backlog remains strong.

**TZL: What do you see as the top three challenges facing A/E firms in the coming year?**

**RM:** 1) Recovering from the lengthy downturn in the economy; 2) The delay in Congress to push funding bills through to passage; and 3) Effective project management in a tight economy.

**TZL: What will your firm do to overcome these challenges?**

**RM:** We will remain fiscally responsible and conservative in our expenditures and we will continue to offer our clients quality services at the best value.

**TZL: What is the favorite part of your job?**

**RM:** On a daily basis, I enjoy interacting with the breadth of talent here at MBP. I learn new things every day and I guide and assist others with the financial and project management process. I consider the team here to be my extended family.

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

**RM:** Spending time with my wife and three young boys.

"I have had the opportunity to build a wonderful, cohesive accounting team. We are the epitome of teamwork and customer service – qualities that I value greatly and that integrate into MBP's values-based organization."

## TRANSACTIONS

**PERKINS+WILL BUYS: Perkins+Will** (Chicago, IL), an international design firm, announced that it is joining forces with the São Paulo-based architecture firm **Rocco,Vidal + arquitetos**.

The practice will be known as RoccoVidal P+W and will serve as the base for operations in South America. Perkins+Will, which has been actively working in South America for some time, is strengthening its offerings and relationships in one of the world's most dynamic markets with a partner that has more than 30 years of experience in architecture, planning, and interior design in Brazil.

With an office of 50 professionals, Rocco,Vidal has created award-winning designs for a wide range of project types, including Marisol's headquarters, a laboratory for Clinico Fleury, a retail space for lighting company Lumini, and the welcome center for the Alphaville residential community.

The firm is known for bold, contemporary designs that integrate the natural environment with ecologically sensitive design strategies. Their understated and quietly elegant interiors are sought after by many of Brazil's leading institutional, corporate, and residential clients.

"Joining with Perkins+Will, whose expertise ranges from corporate interiors and science and technology projects to large-scale healthcare and higher education institutions, enables us to bring a new level of multidisciplinary depth to our clients and to participate in a range of international projects," said Rocco,Vidal founding partner Luiz Fernando Rocco. "This is an integration that advances our shared goal of excellence that melds high design and sustainability."

"We are excited about this new partnership and the enormous potential for success that comes with bringing these two incredibly creative and talented firms together," stated Rocco,Vidal partner Fernando Vidal. "We are poised to bring Brazil some of the best design services and solutions to facilitate the continued growth of the region."

This marks the second global expansion Perkins+Will has completed in the past few months. In June the firm announced its partnership with London-based architecture and design firm **Pringle Brandon**, which opens the door for new opportunities in Europe and the Middle East.

"Brazil has a very sophisticated design scene and a wonderful design legacy, and therefore was definitely a place we wanted to be," said Phil Harrison, chief executive officer of Perkins+Will. "Rocco,Vidal is a forward-thinking firm with terrific talent and energy."

"Their commitment to design excellence and sustainability, strong network of dedicated clients, and culture of exploration and innovation make Rocco,Vidal a compelling and natural complement to Perkins+Will. Together, we will bring world-class design and an expanded level of service to new and existing clients in Brazil and South America."

**MASER BUYS: Maser Consulting P.A.** (Red Bank, NJ), a 325-person multidiscipline engineering consulting firm, announced that it has acquired **TMG Consulting Engineers** (Allentown, PA).

TMG professionals will be relocated to Maser Consulting's office in Bethlehem, a result of its continued plans for growth in the eastern Pennsylvania territory. Former TMG owner, Tony Ganguzza, P.E., will be a consultant to the firm.

"This acquisition will enable us to continue to strengthen our presence in both the Lehigh and Delaware Valleys," said Richard Maser, CEO/president of Maser Consulting. "TMG brings an expertise to Maser Consulting that complements our existing core services presently being offered through our Bethlehem and Exton office locations."

Maser Consulting recently moved its Bethlehem office to a larger facility and relocated its Malvern office to Exton in order to accommodate several growth spurts within the last few months. This growth included the hiring of Philip Gauffreau, Sr., formerly from **NTH Consultants** (Detroit, MI), as project manager of geotechnical services and additional support staff from NTH and TMG, to the new Bethlehem location.

The combined services offered through both locations include site/civil, planning, geotechnical, landscape architecture, survey, and construction inspection.

## FIRMS ON THE MOVE

**RETTEW EXPANDS: RETTEW** (Mechanicsburg, PA), an Engineering News-Record top 200 design firm, announced expansion of its operations to the West. The firm recently signed a lease for office space located in Lakewood, Col.

With horizontal and directional drilling increasing oil and gas exploration in the Rocky Mountain region, clients with whom RETTEW has worked extensively in Pennsylvania's Marcellus Shale play and Ohio's Utica Shale play are also operating in the West and requesting to work with RETTEW. The opening of a Denver office now positions RETTEW to provide engineering, consulting and construction related services to clients involved in oil and gas extraction in some of the country's most prolific oil and gas plays, including Bakken Formation, Powder River Basin, Jonah Field, Green River Basin, Piceance Basin, Uinta Basin and San Juan Basin.

"RETTEW's oil and gas clients rely on our expertise, our hyper-responsiveness, our employees and our reputation for superior service delivery to ensure a successful operation," said Mark Lauriello, president, RETTEW. "Expanding to the West enables us to now offer those attributes to clients in the Rocky Mountain region."

Because of its unique approach to working with oil and gas clients, RETTEW is considered a leading provider of engineering, consulting and construction related services to some of the world's largest oil and gas companies. The firm's success in the energy and utilities market has enabled RETTEW to achieve dramatic, unprecedented growth. Since its involvement in the energy and utilities market, RETTEW has doubled its staff, opened four additional offices and expanded three existing offices. In April, RETTEW jumped a record 249 spots on ENR's annual list of top 500 design firms in the country. The leap in the ENR ranking garnered RETTEW the title of "fastest-growing firm on the Top 500 this year," according to ENR. The firm's 10 other offices are located in Eastern and Midwestern United States.

RETTEW's sister company, Rettew Flowback Inc., also supports the oil and gas industry by providing flowback treatment, frac support and construction services to exploration and production firms. RFI designed a mobile treatment system that recycles 100 percent of flowback and production waters, which can be used in subsequent completions operations. RFI's on-site system conserves water and reduces off-site trucking.