

## EDITORIAL

# What to do if you find yourself in a tight cash position

Sometimes there's no other option than holding back on paying on time, Mark Zweig writes.

Winter of 2011 in the A/E/P and environmental consulting business— it's been a long one for many of us! And along with record cold temperatures and snowfalls in many places in the country (including right here in Fayetteville, Arkansas, where we have about two feet on the ground as I write this), many firms are also facing a cash crisis.

This isn't something that developed overnight. Slowdowns in work, losses, staff reductions, slow paying clients, bankrupt clients, departing shareholders, and more, have contributed to the situation that many firms are seeing. And there is not enough cash and credit to pay bills the way they would like.



Mark Zweig

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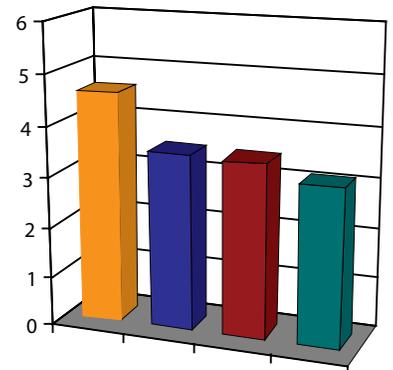
So, if this scenario sounds familiar to you, I want you to consider the following points:

- 1) Face the problem.** It is a problem and it won't go away on its own. Don't live in denial of it. Don't be ashamed. But do take action.
- 2) Realize that you cannot live like you always did.** You are going to have to make some changes. You may pride yourself in paying all your suppliers in 15 days. That may no longer be possible. The alternative of going out of business and paying them nothing is much worse than being slow to pay. This is a hard pill for many to swallow— myself included— but I don't think it is a rationalization. It is in your best interests and those of your suppliers and subconsultants for your firm to survive.

See MARK ZWEIFG, page 2

## TRENDLINES

### EBITDA formulas



- EBITDA by who conducted valuation
- Independent business appraiser
  - Inside accountant
  - Firm principal(s)
  - Firm's usual outside accountant

A/E/P and environmental consulting firms that had an independent business appraiser conduct their valuation had the highest median TIC value/EBITDA ratio (4.61), according to the 2011 Valuation Survey. Meanwhile, valuations performed by firms' usual outside accountants tend to yield a significantly lower ratio (3.15) than those performed by other appraisers. This might be explained by the tendency of accountants to rely on formulas, which tend to undervalue the typical A/E/P and environmental consulting firm.— Margot Suydam, Survey Manager

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**3) Get your cash flow forecasting working.** The last thing you want is NO warning that you have run out of money. Just having a week or two (or ideally, more) may be all you need to stay out of trouble. The warning is critical and your cash flow forecast should provide you with it.

**4) Slow down payments.** Paying a bill 30 days late is better than never paying it at all. It is not something any of us want to admit but this is the reality of the situation. "Yes," you wish you weren't in this position. "Yes," you plan on paying what you owe. But "No," it won't be on time. Most people will understand if you level with them. If you lie about when you will be paying them, it won't be good. If you make a promise, keep it.

**5) Collect the easy-to-collect money early.** Of course you want to pull out all the stops on old money because the longer you wait to collect it the harder it is to do so. But don't ignore the recent bills sent out to good clients, either. Call them. Ask when you will be paid. Ask them to push you up earlier in the payment cycle if it seems possible. Don't assume that a good-paying 45-day client won't pay you in 20 if you ask.

**6) Get all the credit you can.** Besides the bank credit lines there are other sources. Credit cards, for example, may allow you to get by if you really need them. They do have high rates, but would you rather pay 1.5% per month on money borrowed if it keeps you in business or go completely out of business?

I realize not all of our readers are in this kind of shape of even having cash flow problems at all, but many of you are. And if you aren't now, odds are you will be at some point in the future. So, tuck this article away where you can find it if and when that time occurs! ▲▲

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**A/E BUSINESS NEWS**

**USGBC APPLAUDS OBAMA'S GREEN INITIATIVES:** The U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC) applauded a key element of President Obama's plan to "win the future" by making America's commercial buildings more energy- and resource-efficient over the next decade. The President's plan, entitled Better Buildings Initiative, catalyzes private-sector investment through a series of incentives to upgrade offices, stores, schools and universities, hospitals, and other commercial and municipal buildings.

"For all of those committed to the idea that green buildings can create jobs, save energy, and save money, this is a great day, and the entire green building movement is incredibly grateful for President Obama's leadership in this critical step forward for America. It is major steps like these that are necessary to address the challenges facing our environment," said USGBC President, CEO and Founding Chair Rick Fedrizzi.

Leadership companies and organizations across America are already advancing the goals of the President's initiative using USGBC's LEED green building program to measure, manage, and verify the energy and resource savings that President Obama has demanded and by furthering USGBC's mission as corporate members.

"With the incentives the President has outlined, we are confident that these organizations are ready to take green building to an unprecedented scale," Fedrizzi said.

**\$53 BILLION FOR HIGH-SPEED RAIL:** Vice President Joe Biden announced the Obama Administration's plan to dedicate \$53 billion over the next six years to help promote the construction of a national, high-speed, intercity passenger rail network.

Details of the proposal, including potential funding sources, are expected to be outlined in the President's budget proposal, which should be already known when this issue is published, said White House Press Secretary Robert Gibbs.

"I commend the Administration for backing up their bold, new vision of transportation for our country with this plan, and for recognizing that high-speed rail can reduce our dependence on foreign oil, make our cities and regions more competitive, and create short- and long-term jobs," said Petra Todorovich, director of America 2050, a national initiative to meet the infrastructure, economic development, and environmental challenges of the nation.

**RESOURCES**

**OPERATING EXPENSES SURVEY:** In today's economy, it's more important than ever for firm leaders and financial managers to keep overhead costs in check. And every design and environmental firm can cut costs in one area or another. Where does the fat reside in your firm? Where can you minimize spending to maximize profits?

Get the answers to these questions and many more with ZweigWhite's 2010-2011 Operating Expenses Survey of Architecture, Engineering, Planning & Environmental Consulting Firms.

Newly updated for 2011, this survey has the latest, most detailed statistics available on operating expenses for firms just like yours. Get data on everything from how much the average firm spends on professional liability insurance to how much it spends on hardware and software.

We've covered every area of concern to leaders of design and environmental consulting firms—from marketing to human resources to information technology and more.

We packed this report with tables, and broke the data out by firm type, region of headquarters, staff size, growth rate, and client base, so you can make apples-to-apples comparisons between the survey statistics and your own firm.

For more information or to buy a copy, call 800-466-6275 or log on to [www.zweigwhite.com/zw-1005.aspx](http://www.zweigwhite.com/zw-1005.aspx).



*The voice of reason for A/E/P, and environmental consulting firms.*

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## TOP PLAYER

# Inspiration and hardship carve path to success

Leader of one of the world's largest architectural practices is a risk taker, and a winning one, at that.

**R**alph Hawkins is the leader of one of the world's largest architectural practices, 850-person architecture firm **HKS** in Dallas, Texas. But the chairman and CEO of this global architecture powerhouse started humbly enough by digging perimeter beams at construction sites as a teenager. The sweat and pain of that job, and a host of fatherly figures, inspired Hawkins to aspire to higher goals.

In this interview, Hawkins talks about some of those people, his goals and the life-changing hardships that ultimately make you a better person.

**The Zweig Letter: How did you get where you are today?**

**Ralph Hawkins:** I had many people who encouraged me from a child, such as my mom and dad (Hubert and Mickey). Dad, who was a contractor, first suggested that I should be an architect because I like to draw so much. Faculty and colleagues also were influential in my career choices. Outside of that I had many great opportunities.

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

**RH:** My first job was at 13 in construction in the hot Texas heat. I dug perimeter beams for warehouse concrete slabs. I remember those were exhausting jobs that encouraged me to stay in school!

**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?**

**RH:** I like to win and I am very competitive. I think living with a dad who was building a construction business in my younger years shaped me. There were many months we barely had



Ralph Hawkins, Chairman and CEO, HKS.

enough to pay the mortgage and buy groceries. I think that profoundly impacted me. Risk taking and building a financially strong firm always gives me satisfaction.

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

**RH:** Constantly doing your best and having the insatiable desire to serve our clients drives our motivation.

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

**RH:** The trend of information technology is beginning to drive our approach to architecture, as it is in many industries. It is making us better. Globalization is here and active in our industry, but business values and ethics are not always compatible outside the westernized world.

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

**RH:** My father was a special mentor, as was Joe Buskuhl, our past president. Ron Skaggs, who mentored me in health care planning and design, was also influential. I learned to serve them

“My first job was at 13 in construction in the hot Texas heat. I dug perimeter beams for warehouse concrete slabs. I remember those were exhausting jobs that encouraged me to stay in school!”

and as a result, I learned a great deal from them.

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

**RH:** Probably a sense of humor. People with a sense of humor and humility about themselves always seem to survive.

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

**RH:** I started going into kidney failure at 40 and had a wife and two little girls. I was told that I would have to go on dialysis and ultimately have a kidney transplant. It was life changing for me and helped me to focus sharply on my spiritual side, my family and my work ... and how each of them fits into my life. I think that was a big part of my success in my personal and professional life.

**TZL: What question would you ask of another industry leader?**

**RH:** What have you found to be the most significant thing in building a business?

**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?**

**RH:** Be prepared for both failures and success, but most importantly, enjoy the journey of your life and profession. Your career goes by quickly, so remember your family. ▀▲

ON THE RECORD

# Firm culture defines success

It could be client focus, or speed and flexibility, or making quality job one.

Every firm has a culture, and many times success depends on that culture. A negative culture could equal failure, but a great culture could make all the difference. For this feature we asked our readers: "How does your firm's culture define your success? Please provide three defining characteristics of your firm's culture." Below are some of their answers.

**Matthew Moeller, CEO, Dade Moeller** (Richland, WA), a 250-person nuclear, radiological, and environmental operations firm:



Matthew Moeller, CEO, Dade Moeller.

As Dade Moeller is both a person and a company, the roots of our corporate culture represent Dade's key attributes: education, good science, integrity, hard work, and dedication to client satisfaction. As our company has grown, our culture remains a reflection of our firm's identity and

values and is central to our success. In many respects, maintaining our core culture is more important now than ever before, particularly during periods of recent significant growth. Objectively, our corporate culture is the linkage between our employees, old and new, and our company's reputation and brand image. As a services company, our clients hire our staff to perform a job. Our goal in managing our company is to ensure that the services delivered are of high quality, added value, and commensurate cost, regardless of which particular staff member is providing the support. The result is a business model that strives to provide services that meet or exceed our client's expectations, consistent with our firm's identity and values.

During the recent economic roller-coaster, it has been challenging for many businesses to simply stay on

the tracks, let alone prosper. While a strong and positive corporate culture is no guarantee for the successful delivery of services, its absence, or ambiguity, can be fatal. A transparent corporate culture, to both our employees and clients, has always been an important stabilizing factor for our company, particularly at a time when we have almost doubled in size within a 18-month period.

Dissecting our corporate culture is difficult because it includes so many subjective and objective factors. Without question, it is essential that our company's leadership and management team take actions that are consistent with our stated corporate goals, objectives, and values. We have to walk the talk, in a consistent manner. Our corporate culture is exposed in an unadorned fashion when responding to challenges and demanding opportunities. Staff, partners, clients, and competitors alike learn the most about our company during these revealing times. Three important characteristics of Dade Moeller's culture are:

- 1) Mutual respect.** Valuing employees as individuals and teammate corporations as partners (not simply as disposable resources or commodities) is essential in both prosperous and challenging times.
- 2) Client service.** Committing our company and our employees to achieving success for our clients, even when success requires personal hardship, corporate sacrifice, or diminished profitability.
- 3) Professional integrity.** Maintaining a commitment to the high standards, principles, and ethics of our profession; taking the appropriate scientific and technical position, even if it eliminates some business opportunities, potential teammate corporations, or clients.

**Tom Hendrick, principal/COO, Wallace Engineering Structural Consultants, Inc.** (Tulsa, OK), a 130-per-



Tom Hendrick, Principal/COO, Wallace Engineering Structural Consultants, Inc.

son structural and civil engineering consulting firm:

Responsiveness, flexibility, quality, and creativity are attributes our clients expect and deserve. All are a part of our culture at Wallace Engineering. Being responsive and flexible are just two of the things that have allowed us to earn the confidence and loyalty of our clients, and

they're why clients think of us as an essential partner. We are committed to impeccable quality and holding paramount the health, safety, and welfare of the public. We strive to be known as a highly creative firm that is known for clever solutions and unique approaches to our clients' needs. All of these things are part of the mission, vision, and culture at Wallace and help define our success.

**Kevin Phillips, CEO of FPM Group Ltd.** (Ronkonkoma, NY), a 100-person full-service environmental and traditional engineering firm:



Kevin Phillips, CEO, FPM Group.

At FPM the firm culture is that of added value. All the managers are asked to put on the hats of their clients and solve their problems as if they were their own. This may not be the best from a profitability standpoint, as sometimes it strains budgets, but from a long-

term relationship perspective, clients know when you are truly working for them. In addition, by adopting this culture, our employees are also happier to perform their projects because they see themselves as problem-solvers and valuable not only to clients but to the firm as well. ▲▲

"Responsiveness, flexibility, quality, and creativity are attributes our clients expect and deserve. All are part of our culture."

## CASE STUDY

# IPD insurance solution crafted

Single-project insurance and project-specific liability insurance the answer.

By JOÃO FERREIRA  
Managing Editor

The debate over the risks associated with and the insurability of Integrated Project Delivery contracts has led many (maybe most) A/E/P and environmental consulting firms to steer clear of truly implementing the collaborative concept.

A basic premise of IPD is that better projects attained through a team severely curtail the possibility of litigation, but this still leaves serious questions regarding the allocation of risk among parties. The situation is exacerbated by the lack of off-the-shelf insurance products covering contract teams in the U.S.

Now, one IPD project team has done it.

The \$385 million Owensboro Medical Health Center project in Owensboro, Kentucky, under construction, is utilizing a novel insurance coverage scheme that meets the aspirations of pure IPD—a single-project insurance policy that covers the entire team.

“One set of insurers is insuring all the parties to the project,” says Dan Knise, president and CEO of Ames & Gough, an A/E/P and environmental consulting industry-focused specialty insurance brokerage.

In addition to the traditional OCIP (Owner-Controlled Insurance Program) for construction-related risks, the parties to the IPD agreement (the owner, architect, contractor, and the mechanical, electrical, and plumbing engineer), took the concept a step further and purchased a project-specific professional liability policy to help minimize the potential of cross litigation, Knise says. The premium was considered a project cost by the owner and a project contingency fund buffers the insurance and pays for any deductibles or uncovered losses.

Coverage was sourced through Lexington Insurance, one of just a few insurers offering IPD-specific coverage.

**HOW IT HAPPENED.** Owensboro Medical Health System wanted the 780,000-square-foot project—designed by **HGA Architects and Engineers** (Minneapolis, MN), a 700-person integrated architecture, engineering, and planning firm—to be developed under the IPD method from the onset.

Patrick Duke, senior vice president with project manager KLMK Group, says it soon became apparent that only an IPD-specific insurance product would do for this ambitious project, describing it as “key for the team to be able to agree on a multiparty agreement.”

A consultant with extensive experience in the health care field and a growing résumé of IPD projects, KLMK proposed the idea to the project team.

“We brought in the experts (Ames & Gough); they helped us craft the solution. We brought it to the team,” Duke says. “People were very happy that we were coming to the table with a solution.”

Nevertheless, it wasn’t easy to accomplish the coverage, with negotiations lasting about three months. There were doubts about disclaimers, as well as a hitch regarding language on exclusions, but in the end the team signed on the policy.

The challenge with IPD coverage is that the concept is built around the principle of no fault—pretty much a foreign idea in the U.S.

“That’s the issue that we had to wrestle with to make this work,” Knise says.

The solution accommodated U.S. insurance rules and didn’t eliminate negligence standards, Knise says. Thus, the insurance policy will still respond if somebody is eventually negligent.

“Contingency funds become the vehicle that allows for this,” Knise says.

Matt Gough, vice president and partner at Ames & Gough, says the contingency is 5% of total construction cost.

While IPD insurance products are still emerging, Gough says a standard policy for these types of projects doesn’t really exist out there.

“You are going to have to tailor the policy to the project,” he says, adding that the Lexington Insurance policy for

## IN BRIEF

**Project:** Owensboro Medical Health Center project in Owensboro, Kentucky.

**Type of delivery:** Four-member Integrated Project Delivery team.

**Insurance program:** Single-project insurance policy (OCIP) that covers the entire team, plus project-specific professional liability policy.

**Cost:** Five percent of total construction cost of \$280 million.

this project “looks a lot different today than when we first received it.”

**LESSONS LEARNED.** Duke says the only real hiccup in the process pertained to the fine print in the exclusions section of the contract, with team members expressing concern with a professional liability exclusion on reimbursements (the team has to expire the contingency fund first before they draw into policy).

“We had to work through that with the insurer,” Duke says. “They created what we need that matched the contract. You really need to pay attention to those,” he says.

Despite the challenges in assembling project-specific coverage, the parties involved in the team believe that to attain the goals of IPD, this is the only feasible solution. To have every party bring their insurance to the table “makes no sense,” Knise says.

“You really need to have one policy,” he says.

“This is an evolutionary situation. We have not created the final model,” Knise says. “This is a step in the right direction. Project insurance seems to be the way to go.”

Duke says that while the project is not finished (it is scheduled for completion in 2012), he believes that this cost-neutral coverage solution should ultimately produce savings when compared with traditional insurance coverage, not only because of the economies of scale in developing a combined policy, but because it will produce a safer, better project in the end.

“It’s working great so far,” he says.



## STRATEGY

# How to enter the federal contracts market

An opportunity to create a solid relationship with a very loyal client.

By JULIE KYLE  
Editor

Every year, the government procures huge amounts of items and services, at a rate of something like \$400 billion per year. The federal contracts market can appear very attractive to firms that know how relatively few players there are compared to the size of the market, says Dave Alexander, author of the *Guide to Winning Federal Government Contracts for A/E/P & Environmental Consulting Firms, 2nd Edition*, which explains how to win traditional federal contracts.



Dave Alexander,  
Lincoln  
Strategies, LLC.

“The U.S. government is a client that pays its bills on time, in a lot of cases within 30 days. They are reliable, and there is zero credit risk,” Alexander, principal with Lincoln Strategies LLC, says. “But there is such a high degree of intimidation and fear out there that some firms aren’t even considering it.”

That is a mistake that firms make partly because of some common myths about the process.

“One myth a lot of firms believe is that you have to write these gargantuan proposals in order to be awarded,” Alexander says.

That’s one way to do it, he says, but there are many other creative ways to begin the process. For instance, companies that subcontract through an existing prime contractor may carry virtually zero burden when it comes to writing proposals.

Another myth is that the market is biased toward large companies. “The large companies get large revenues, sure. But that has nothing to do with the fact that today there’s plenty of money available, and some government contracts are actually biased toward smaller businesses,” Alexander says.

Firms can expect to find that feder-

al work is full of rules and regulations, and knowing the rules gives any firm an advantage; however, following them is crucial.

“If you can be trusted to work within the rules and be a safe contract, you can count on their loyalty. If you do a good job for the government, they will keep on giving you work even if you make small mistakes along the way,” because finding and signing a new contractor is a headache, Alexander says.

The federal government is so rule-bound because it needs to stay safe, and if they feel like you will play by the rules and not get them into trouble, they’ll keep using you.

“If you can do this, you will forge a long-standing, solid relationship with a very loyal client,” Alexander says.

### SUSTAINABILITY INITIATIVES COULD LEAD TO WORK.

The Obama Administration’s strong commitment to the environment and sustainability could create opportunity for A/E/P and environmental consulting firms.

The government recently reiterated its guiding principals for sustainable buildings, says Donald Horn with the GSA’s Office of Federal High Performance Green Buildings. “The goal is for 15% of the entire inventory of government buildings to meet green building standards regarding water management, greenhouse gas emissions reductions, and energy efficiency by 2015,” Horn says.

Just as an example, the U.S. Army a new sustainable design and development initiative in December that incorporates requirements of the green building Standard 189.1.

The policy applies to all construction and renovation of new buildings and structures in the U.S. territories, permanent overseas Active Army installations, Army Reserve Centers, Army National Guard facilities, and Armed Forces Reserve Centers. The footprint of the existing Army buildings and structures worldwide covers more than 954 mil-

lion square feet.

Standard 189.1, published early in 2010 by ASHRAE in conjunction with the Illuminating Engineering Society of North America (IES) and USGBC, provides a green building plan for those who choose to design, build, and operate green buildings. The policy addresses site sustainability, water use efficiency, energy efficiency, indoor environmental quality, and the building’s impact on the atmosphere, materials, and resources. ▲▲

“If you do a good job for the government, they will keep on giving you work even if you make small mistakes along the way.”

### HOW TO IDENTIFY YOUR NEXT CLIENT MARKET

The government provides endless resources to help you track where money (including American Recovery and Reinvestment Act) is going and possibly identify projects that suit your firm. For example, the *recovery.org* web site offers tools to track by state, recipient, and project type.

FedBizOpps.gov ([www.fbo.gov](http://www.fbo.gov)) is another source providing information on upcoming contracts, as is *usaspending.gov* and GSA’s web site ([www.gsa.gov](http://www.gsa.gov)).

Federal contracts are increasingly shifting to services—by as much as 50% in the past four to five years, according to *INPUT.com*, a company that provides market intelligence, analysis, and events and training to help companies develop government business and public sector organizations achieve their objectives.

These changes may cause larger companies to begin marketing their services more aggressively to private enterprises. And smaller businesses may sense a growing opportunity with the federal government and begin the process to bid on new contracts.

With few exceptions, most of the largest contracts to be awarded in fiscal 2011 are re-competes of expiring deals in which contracting officials are seeking multiple vendors, rather than a single source to perform the work, according to an October 2010 report from *INPUT*.

## PM PERSPECTIVES

# Isn't it ironic?

"It takes irony to appreciate the joke which is on oneself." —

*Jessamyn West*

A few weeks ago, I was talking to a client about his firm's project management practices, its managers, and systems, and... eventually we began discussing the challenges and frustrations he was having on many levels. He was hoping a little dose of project management training for the team would resolve these issues once and for all.

The things he shared were not unlike the situations I've seen in many other firms I've worked with and the solutions he was looking for were not altogether out of his reach. What he didn't realize was the lesson in irony available at his disposal. He had lectured and insisted and demanded compliance to the firm's project management procedures. Some adhered and others did not. Age was not a defining factor in the equation, either— everyone was a potential violator. Bringing in a consultant as a third-party, neutral spokesperson on the topic of best practices was surely going to get them to convert. Or would it?

Everyone likes a little humor so, rather than yelling at his teams, I suggested he pose these ironies, make appropriate adjustments, and have an honest conversation with the group.

■ **Scope creep and job creep.** Isn't it ironic that project managers will give away all sorts of free work to a client that's clearly not in the scope but balk if the firm expects something not explicitly detailed in their job description? Putting in eight, 12 or 20 additional (and unpaid) hours as a favor to the client always seems more acceptable and less outrageous a request than doing a little marketing or helping clean up the detail library.



Christine Brack

And sometimes when they do chip in to help the firm, they want an immediate promotion to principal. Position descriptions— especially for project managers— are never finite. Just like scopes, there's going to be creep, and being a project manager means accepting all sorts of written and unwritten responsibilities.

■ **Paid overtime, expenses and A/R collections.** Isn't it ironic that project managers will run like greased lightning into accounting if overtime or expenses are missing from a paycheck but protest about calling a client about a past due invoice? This is where that job description comes in handy. Very few project manager role descriptions have this listed as a required task! The average collection period for the industry is 74 days. It's tough to keep payroll going if cash flow is lagging so far behind. The project manager has the best relationship with the client. He should follow up— immediately— not 74 days later. Try, "Accounting has brought it to my attention that this invoice is still unpaid. Did we not provide something or not live up to your expectations? I really want to make it right. What can I do?"

■ **Technology versus forms.** Isn't it ironic that project managers want the firm to spend thousands of dollars on bleeding-edge technology, gadgets, toys, and the newest software, but reject the streamlined forms developed by the project management committee? This particular client implemented a simple spreadsheet to estimate budgets more realistically. The managers who refuse to use it like working with the old-fashioned, back of the envelope method that is highly inaccurate. They claim the spreadsheet is too difficult to use and they are too attached to their old tools to learn anything new. If that's the case, maybe they should return to the abacus, pencil, and tracing paper. Project profitability is no laughing matter when competition is fierce. The difference between the two possible

### ZWEIGWHITE IN-HOUSE TRAINING

Targeted in-house programs can provide your firm with the best and most cost-effective professional development training, and ZweigWhite can craft the solution.

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budgets should be more than enough evidence to validate the importance of using this spreadsheet. There is no negotiating allowed on this one.

■ **Design versus management.** Isn't it ironic that project managers want to be in the role of project manager but don't like or want to do any of the actual management stuff? No doubt that architects and engineers like practicing their craft. That's what they went to school for; that's their passion. But projects need control mechanisms, they have administrative details, and they need someone to keep it on course. Projects don't run on autopilot while the manager enjoys designing and hopes the RFIs, e-mails, and stakeholder issues magically go away. Even while a project manager may lend expertise or execute large portions of the design work, there are management duties to tend to. Sure those aren't the most exciting moments of the job but they are part of the role. Understand that a project manager has a split personality of designer and manager— and both are essential.

For the most part, project managers cannot have it both ways, but hollering won't convince anyone of the contrary. Sometimes presenting the irony of the situation helps both sides come to a mutual agreement to reach something better. ▲▲

CHRISTINE BRACK, PMP, is a principal with ZweigWhite specializing in strategic business planning and project management best practices. Contact her at [cbrack@zweigwhite.com](mailto:cbrack@zweigwhite.com).

For the most part, project managers cannot have it both ways, but hollering won't convince anyone of the contrary. Sometimes presenting the irony of the situation helps both sides come to a mutual agreement to reach something better.

## GUEST SPEAKER

# On tangors and other 'exotic' fruit

Improving client relationships and loyalty requires clearly articulating value.

My oldest daughter Rachael recently turned 12. For her birthday, she asked that my wife Jennifer and I take her to Seattle for an "overnighter." It was a great trip. The highlight was an afternoon spent wandering the Pikes Place Market. If you've never been there, it's a special place—especially if you enjoy food. Like most farmers' markets, Pikes Place has an odd collection of food, produce, and craft vendors. At one fruit stand, an energetic man selling tangors (tangerine/orange hybrids) approached us. He stood in front of a huge pile of well-sorted, colored fruits from exotic locations. He offered a wedge of tangor from California, a slice of a new apple variety from Chile, and a free exotic plum (origin unknown) for the birthday girl. My wife and I spent \$20 on four pieces of fruit, including a \$5-per-pound pair of apples. I laughed as we left the stand, recognizing I had bought more than just fruit.

My realization wasn't regret. The price wasn't too high. We bought great produce, learned the origin of the tangor, tasted several unknown fruit varieties, and gave my daughter a new experience. Oh, and I found a subject for my next *The Zweig Letter* article! Twenty dollars well spent.

Recently I also sent a client a disastrous fee proposal. I enjoy working with this client, although I know he often shops my proposals. Admittedly, I prepared the proposal in haste. It was the end of the week and I was trying to get away from the office to take my daughter on a



Derrick Smith

weekend birthday trip. Not surprisingly, this client called on Monday to complain about my fee. I had the typical reactions: he didn't understand the scope, he doesn't appreciate our value, and he is looking for a commodity. I also questioned, "Is he a client we should be working for?"

Perhaps these reactions were appropriate. However, I also recognized my proposal was weak. It was a typical letter proposal: "Thanks for the opportunity," and included lists of assumptions, proposed tasks, excluded services, and a price. I didn't include the equivalent of an education on the origin of the tangor, tastes of previously unknown fruit varieties, or other new experiences. In other words, I did not sell our real and unique value.

This isn't a sales gimmick. Relief to real client pain provides value. Good clients pay for value. We err when we assume our value is implied and easily recognized. Worse, we downplay our value and promote lowest price buying by focusing on specifications and fee breakdowns.

Instead, sell value by:

**1) Clearly communicating your client's need or pain.** If you don't understand what's really driving their purchasing decisions, you haven't done your homework. The consultant who best shows they understand their client's needs wins.

**2) Painting a vivid picture for true project success.** Sometimes, my clients mistakenly assume that success is merely a completed road design, sewer solution, or project entitlement. This is transactional, commodity thinking. Instead, communicate the impact your services have beyond the completed task.

As an example, I have a client who is *extremely* price sensitive. In fact, I don't know if I've ever had a client who watched his expenses as closely. However, I have continually

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knocked the ball out-of-the-park for this client. I've connected him with profitable partners, I've negotiated him sweetheart agency entitlements, and I've resolved significant conflicts. We've rarely put those services on our timecards or invoices, and this client would struggle to properly value them. Price for this client is now a distant consideration. We've redefined project success for him.

**3) Explaining how only your firm can best relieve your client's real pain and achieve true project success.** This step is familiar territory, only now you are explaining your approach and qualification on your own terms. Be specific.

If executed well, this three-step approach will redefine the services your clients buy and educate them on the tremendous value you provide. And, on a personal note, I've found the understanding gained through this process dramatically improves my client relationships. ▀▀

DERRICK SMITH is a senior vice president at **MacKay & Sposito, Inc. (M&S)** (Vancouver, WA). Contact him at [dsmith@mackaysposito.com](mailto:dsmith@mackaysposito.com).

Good clients pay for value. We err when we assume our value is implied and easily recognized. Worse, we downplay our value and promote lowest price buying by focusing on specifications and fee breakdowns.

## TRENDS

# Flexible workplace catching on

Policies increase productivity, engagement and satisfaction.

By SUSANNAH SWEARINGEN  
Correspondent

The workplace, and the workforce, has changed drastically over the last several decades.

There are more women in the workplace, more families in which both parents work, and more employees who are caring for aging parents.

Technology has made it possible for employees to work from virtually any place with an Internet connection. And new generations of employees are challenging the traditional 8 to 5 workday.

Employees are increasingly demanding the kind of flexibility in their jobs that will help them attain the work/life balance that suits them.

According to a study conducted by the Families and Work Institute in 2009, 87% of employees report that flexibility in their jobs would be "extremely" or "very" important in deciding whether to take a new job.

In response, many businesses are beginning to adopt flexible workplace strategies, and finding that being flexible helps them retain employees.

A poll conducted by the Society for Human Resource Management found that of HR professionals who reported that their organizations have adopted flexible work arrangements, 89% said the arrangements positively affected retention.

SHRM and the Families and Work Institute (FWI) have teamed up to share research on how flexible workplace policies can benefit employees and employers. The partnership, called Moving Work Forward, also aims to help employers implement strategies that will improve the lives of employees, while giving businesses a competitive advantage.

**TIME CRUNCH.** According to a report written by FWI, three in four em-

ployed parents (75%) feel they don't have enough time with their children, up from 66% in 1992. The same report found that 63% of employees in couple relationships feel they don't have enough time with their spouse or partner, compared with 50% in 1992. And 60% of employees feel they don't have enough time for themselves.

The issue of workplace flexibility is no longer one that only affects working mothers.

"This is an issue that effects both men and women, at various stages in their lives," says Shirley Davis, SHRM's director of global diversity and inclusion and co-lead on the workplace flexibility partnership.

**BENEFITS.** Davis said a multitude of research shows that having a flexible workplace increases retention.

"We recently got results back from our own survey at SHRM, and the number one reason employees said they like working at SHRM is the emphasis on work/life balance," she says. "That's a common trend we're hearing from a number of organizations."

Davis says research shows that flexible work policies increase productivity, engagement, and satisfaction.

"It makes people want to come work for you," she says. "It's a great talent acquisition tool."

Studies have also shown that flexible workplace policies make for healthier employees.

FWI found that employees in flexible work situations are in better overall health with fewer minor health



Shirley Davis,  
Director of Global  
Diversity and  
Inclusion, SHRM.

problems, fewer incidents of depression, lower stress levels and fewer sleep problems.

James Zenyuh, director of human resources at **E.K. Fox & Associates** (Fairfax, VA), a 58-person consulting engineering firm, says workplace flexibility is an important feature in the firm's recruiting process, particularly in the Washington, D.C., area.

"Commutes can easily range between one to two hours in the worst case, so allowing employees to build their schedules around our core hours (8 a.m.-5 p.m.) is an important benefit," he says. "We allow employees to have modified schedules within a two hour window of the core hours start and stop."

"This lets them try to 'beat' the rush that exists during heaviest traffic periods. Also, it gives employees the flexibility to work around outside personal commitments, whether it's family or other extracurricular activities that occur on occasion."

Davis says there are many flexible workplace policies that employers can implement, including flexible work hours, telecommuting, compressed work weeks and job sharing strategies.

"It's not a one-size-fits-all strategy," she says.

The partnership is not advocating a government mandate that tells employers they have to implement certain policies.

Rather, Davis says, the partnership aims to show the benefits in adapting to a shift in workplace demographics and offering flexible policies.

"We do believe workplace flexibility is the way of the future," she says. "It's a competitive strategy for organizations and we really believe is going to be the difference between those organizations that survive and those that thrive." ■▲

"(Workplace flexibility is) a competitive strategy for organizations and we really believe is going to be the difference between those organizations that survive and those that thrive."

## BY THE NUMBERS

# All roads lead to... SHRM

In a profession that overwhelms with change, associations provide safe harbor.

By JOÃO FERREIRA  
Managing Editor

There's one place almost everybody in HR departments in the A/E/P and environmental consulting industries goes to stay abreast of changes in the profession—the Society of Human Resource Management.

However, HR training is a never-ending process, they also complain.

A full 65% of respondents to this month's *By The Numbers* survey said that SHRM is their primary source of information on HR topics. An equal number of respondents also said that one never knows enough.

"It is very hard to pinpoint just one avenue for keeping up with changes in the HR profession," says Carla Erickson, HR director with **Withers & Ravenel, Inc.** (Cary, NC), a 100-person civil and environmental consulting engineering firm. "There is so much going on out there with health care reform, changes to reporting of W2s for next year, and compliance dates to meet. You have to keep up with all of it, one way or another. We are always on our toes, and working with peers, networking, and reading all play a big part to each piece of the pie to HR knowledge and change."

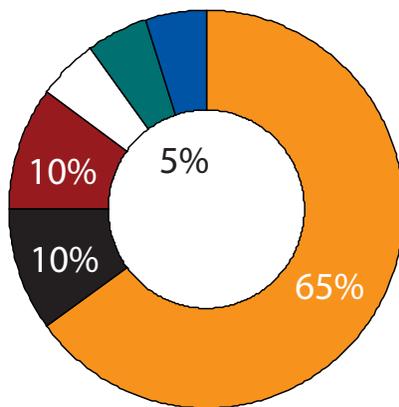
Erickson picked the SHRM answer.

Besides professional organizations, training (e.g., seminars and webinars), and online HR communities were also popular choices, but only 10% of respondents in each instance picked them as their primary source of information about the profession.

"I attend a legal seminar each year to get an overall review of the changes in employment law," said one respondent. "I participate in webinars and one-day seminars on practical HR day-to-day items."

**NEVER ENOUGH.** Besides an overwhelming number of respondents saying that no amount of training is ever enough, 20% also said the HR profes-

HOW DO YOU (PRIMARILY) KEEP ABREAST OF CHANGES IN THE HR PROFESSION?



- I'm a member of professional organizations such as SHRM.
- I participate in training seminars/webinars.
- I'm a member of online HR communities, including social media.
- I learn from my peers.
- I learn on the job.
- Other.

sion is changing too fast to keep abreast of all the transformations.

"It is hard to stay current with changing trends and legal alterations, and even understanding what the new changes mean. You really need a good combination of seminars, reading publications, and communication with peers," one respondent said.

In the end, despite all the challenges, Erickson said she's happy to do what she does.

"This profession can be challenging but also a very exciting one at the same time," she says. "Everyone has their own niche on how to grasp and run with the information they have. Being part of associations and networking to me is a great asset because sharing information and experience helps each other grow and apply that knowledge to their own workday. You may be handling an event or task in your own way. But share those tasks in communication to others and you may possibly find out and learn another avenue or shortcut that could cut down on time or increase the overall outcome of the event. Brainstorming with others can lead to powerful results." ▀▀

## ON THE MOVE

### WHITE JOINS 3TARCHITECTS:

**3tarchitects** (Albany, NY), a nine-person design and architecture firm, recently added a new designer/project manager, **Kevin White**, to their experienced and creative team. White joins 3tarchitects with more than 10 years of combined experience: four years as a designer/project manager for **Truex Cullins Architects** in Burlington, Vermont; and more than six years of experience as an intern architect for **Hamilton Houston Lownie Architects, Flynn Battaglia Architects**, and for **Foit-Albert Associates**, all located in Buffalo, New York.

"In wanting to grow strategically, we look for candidates who possess a strong portfolio of experience combined with an unyielding passion for the work they do," said Scott Townsend, founder and principal of 3tarchitects. "Kevin fit the bill perfectly, and we are glad to have him as part of our team."

Additionally, 3tarchitects is celebrating its fifth anniversary of doing business and has grown to include 3tstudios, a full-service branding and marketing group.

### PAPADOPULOS BECOMES ASSOCIATE:

**Stefanos Papadopoulos** has been named associate at **ENGEO Incorporated** (San Ramon, CA), a 150-person civil engineering, geology, hydrology, and environmental consulting firm.

Papadopoulos joined ENGEO in 2002 and provides geotechnical expertise on private and public projects, as well as financial and cost benefit analyses. Working out of the firm's San Francisco office, he leads ENGEO's project management, oversight, and geotechnical support services to the Treasure Island and Hunters Point Shipyard Redevelopment projects, and leads programs for geotechnical and geological services to Bay Area school districts.

"Helping colleagues and clients to achieve their maximum potential is what drives me every day," he says.

Papadopoulos came to the Bay Area from his native Greece, obtained a B.S. at the University of California at Berkeley, and in 1994 received an M.S. in Geotechnical Engineering. In the 1990s, Papadopoulos was involved in the Bay Area's major transit projects including the BART extension to San Francisco Airport, the Third Street light rail extension, and the SFO International Terminal expansion project. Before joining ENGEO, he was involved in transportation projects overseas.

## DEVELOPMENT

# Professional development options abound

CFOs utilize roundtables, online forums and in-house sessions to stay abreast of changes.

By JULIE KYLE  
Editor

The drive for constant self-improvement is an important aspect of any professional's career. Professional development is often a requirement in many professionals' lives. Continuing education courses are required yearly for recertification for many across the A/E/P and engineering spectrums.

CFOs are not immune from these requirements. Fortunately, options abound.



J. Dan Lavergne,  
VP of Finance  
and CFO, C. H.  
Fenstermaker &  
Associates, Inc.

"Finance is like anything else, it's changing all the time, and if you don't find ways to stay informed about what's happening around you, you get left behind," says J. Dan Lavergne, CFO, **C. H. Fenstermaker & Associates, Inc.** (Lafayette, LA), a 90-person engineering, surveying and mapping, environmental consulting, and advanced technologies firm.

Professional and trade organizations can offer much more than just a means by which one may stay legitimate. From offering codes of professional conduct to updates on industry regulations, professional organizations serve specific interests of members who share a common field of activity.

For example, the American Institute of Certified Accountants offers over 300 self-study courses covering topics in a broad range of areas, including audit standards, accounting standards, taxation, financial management, ethics, fraud and internal controls.

The institute also provides Twitter updates on industry news, hosts many

conferences across the U.S. every year, and provides access to industry-specific web events.

"While we offer continuing education courses that CPAs have to take in order to maintain their license, we see ourselves going beyond that," says Mike Ramos, director of continuing professional education and training with AIC-PA. "We have courses on topics such as fraud detection and prevention, personal finance, and general business management."

Ramos says a popular program at AIC-PA is the self-study training tied to the monthly trade publication they offer, *General Accountancy*.

"We provide a workbook which points to articles in the journal, along with supplemental reading, review questions and an exam," he says. "When they pass an exam, they receive continuing education credits, but it's a great publication to read. It's current, it's topical; it's a news magazine. I can tell you, we're a profession of geeks, so we like reading about our business. But our employers expect us to be on top of things.

"For instance, health care reform is all over the news. Your employer may ask you, 'What does this mean for us?' Our employers expect us to be on top of things," he says.

**VARIETY OF OPTIONS.** Many professional societies and local roundtables also sponsor mentoring programs, specialized training and lunch-and-learn meetings during which an expert on a common topic will speak.

There are many avenues by which one may continue their journey of professional self-discovery and improvement. The key is going beyond what's required to make the resource work for you.

"For financial changes that are specific to engineering firms, I rely on my contacts in the Engineering Society and the CPA firm that conducts our overhead audit. For financial changes that are generic, I participate in our local CFO roundtable and our state society of CPA's continuing education programs," Lavergne says. "With the

roundtable, we've had presentations on how to raise capital, how to evaluate our 401k plan, and on going public. If I need an attorney in a particular area, I'll call around to others in my roundtable."

Continuing education courses are necessary, he agrees, but adds, "I get to pick and choose the courses I want that are related to my job, or related to issues I'm facing at the moment."

Kristin Olszack, CFO at **Helix Environmental Planning, Inc.** (La Mesa, CA), a 190-person general engineering and landscape construction contractor, uses traditional means to stay abreast of changes, but isn't shy about taking to social media either.

"I'm part of a CFO roundtable group here in San Diego that meets once a month, and also I utilize a lot of groups on LinkedIn to stay in contact with others in my profession," she says.

**IN-HOUSE APPROACH.** Jeb Shell, comptroller at **Hargrove Engineers & Constructors** (Mobile, AL), a 258-person full-service engineering, procurement, and construction management firm, says the company places "very high importance on enhancing the quality of service we provide, as well as the lives of our employees."

Therefore, they don't skip on training, and it applies to everybody.

"We built a training room in our building, and we frequently have lunch-and-learn meetings where we can have a speaker or expert come in and talk, for example, on the latest 3-D CAD technology," he says. "We just finished a year-long, hour-a-week training program focused on getting certified with the Construction Industry Institute, and we're in the process of reviewing what we'll implement."

He said he has seen improved coordination with clients as a direct result of its company's focus on offering professional development training to its employees, and that he feels the company has gotten much better at "approaching projects as a team as they're working with a client." ■■

# FINANCE INSIDER

## Understand basic financial statements

Knowing the difference between a balance sheet and an income statement increases your caché with your banker.

One component to a successful banking relationship is having a good understanding of your financial statements. Your ability to readily and intelligently answer questions posed by a banking professional gives loan officers a greater comfort level with your financial skills, and bankers like to lend money to people who appear to be on the ball. A full set of financial statements consists of a balance sheet, an income statement (also known as a profit and loss statement) and a cash flow statement. A brief discussion of each follows:

**BALANCE SHEET.** The balance sheet provides your lender with a snapshot of the business' financial health as of a certain date in time. It is the scorecard of what you own (the assets) and what you owe (the liabilities). The difference between the two, hopefully a positive number, is the equity you have built in the firm over the life of the company. That equity number will fluctuate with net income earned each year and any distributions made to owners.

**INCOME STATEMENT.** If the balance sheet is your scorecard, the income statement is your report card. The income statement is a report of the financial performance of the company over a certain period of time. It could be monthly, quarterly, annually or anything in between. A good steward of the financial health of the



Tracey Jeffers

company will closely monitor the income statement on a regular basis. The income statement is a report of gross revenues, the gross margin, operating expenses, other income/expenses, taxes and net income.

It is always a good idea to look at your income statement in context with past financial performance or future expectations. You may want to produce income statements that compare performance to the previous year or you may produce income statements that show your progress toward income goals and the management of expenses along the way.

**CASH FLOW STATEMENT.** The cash flow statement shows the total amount of cash that flowed into and out of the business over a certain period of time and the amount of cash that flowed out of the business over the same period. Many small firms

do not produce cash flow statements, but it is a good management tool to track the cash. If you have an outside CPA firm that produces your financial statements, they can add the production of a cash flow statement to your monthly reports.

If you keep your books internally, many software programs, such as *QuickBooks*, have a cash flow report function.

The caution with using the cash flow report available in any software program is that you must be fully utilizing the software and inputting all of the necessary data consistently in order to produce a good, credible, reliable cash flow statement. ▽▲

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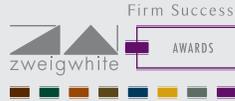
In an upcoming issue of *The Zweig Letter*, Tracey Jeffers looks at two types of income statements and examines the various components of financial statements.

Your ability to readily and intelligently answer questions posed by a banking professional gives loan officers a greater comfort level with your financial skills, and bankers like to lend money to people who appear to be on the ball.



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