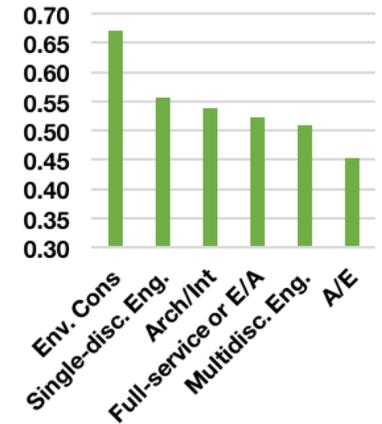


TRENDLINES

Value per NSR



Using probability theory

“Even if you don’t apply it to your business, knowing probabilities of success will at least keep you from buying scratch tickets or blowing your cash in a slot machine at a casino somewhere!”



Mark Zweig

EDITORIAL

It’s funny how engineers – well trained in statistics and probability theory as it relates to the chances a piece of property will flood – or when certain types of materials are likely to fail – or when structures are likely to collapse – completely forget this stuff when it comes to other aspects of their business.

There are many uses for probability theory in an AEC firm. Here are a few:

- **Marketing.** There’s a specific probability that any given piece of direct mail or email sent out will elicit an inquiry. There is also a specific probability that any inquiry will result in a project opportunity. It is useful to have this information, so response expectations are realistic, and enough mail and email pieces are sent to generate the number of inquiries you feel you need to sell one or more projects. My experience is that most people in this business have greatly exaggerated ideas about likely response rates. As a result, they don’t put out enough mail and email to get the inquiries they hope to get.
- **Selling.** There is a certain probability that a given proposal or SOQ for a specific service or project type will make a short list. Then there is a certain probability that any given interview will result in being selected by the client. It’s good to know this information because it’s very useful to predict your future sales and workload. Again, the problem for most firms in this business is to have too few project opportunities needed to sell the amount of (profitable) work they hope to get. It’s popular among many marketers today to say doing less is more, that fewer responses increases the overall quality of their efforts, and thus equates to better sales. If this thinking is taken too far,

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In Zweig Group’s *2019 Valuation Survey*, valuation ratios were analyzed by firm type over the last three years.

In relation to value per net service revenue, it’s interesting to note that firms that are more specialized are perhaps optimizing their value in comparison to their multi-discipline counterparts. The median value for Environmental Consulting firms was 0.67, meaning that they were valued at around 67 percent of their annual NSR.

Don’t forget! Participate in a survey and save \$320 on any Zweig Group research publication. Visit bit.ly/TZLsp to learn more.

MORE COLUMNS

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Incredibly grateful: Megan Armendariz

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ON THE MOVE

WDA GROWS LEADERSHIP TEAM AMIDST RECORD GROWTH William Duff Architects, a firm widely-regarded for its values of design excellence, transparent business practices and progressive culture, is pleased to welcome Sarah Mergy as business development and commercial interior design manager. Mergy will work directly with founder William Duff, in addition to the larger William Duff Architects management team, on business strategy.

Mergy brings more than 20 years of experience in retail management, consumer research, interior design and architecture, most recently as associate principal and senior associate at Bull Stockwell Allen where she managed firm communications, including a rebranding project, helped develop a new tenant improvement service area, and established a new profit center for the firm's commercial practice group.

"WDA is a growing and dynamic firm built on a strong foundation of core values that can sustain success for generations. I am excited to connect people with design, to collaborate with clients on problem-solving and to work alongside such a caring, competent and creative team."

Since establishing his namesake firm, which recently celebrated its 20th anniversary, Duff has developed William Duff Architects's reputation as a go-to firm for a discerning clientele. The firm's portfolio includes retail and restaurant projects for established brands like Isabel Marant, Burberry and Gucci, as well as emerging companies like Brilliant Earth, Back of the House, and High Flying Foods.

William Duff Architects's residential commissions include the award-winning Big Ranch Road for art and architecture patrons Cindy and Howard

Rachofsky. Commercial projects range from tenant improvements to adaptive reuse for clients such as City of San Francisco and San Francisco Unified School District, in addition to private sector entities such as CBS Interactive, Urthecast, The Bay Club, and Oppenheimer & Co.

"Sarah understands our business, and her values align with our values," states Duff. "Since our earliest days, we have defined success through partnerships that are committed to mutually desired outcomes, not only for our clients, but also for consultants, communities and the William Duff Architects staff on which the firm is built. Having Sarah on our team further solidifies our commitment to the future growth of William Duff Architects."

Mergy is a member of the Society for Marketing Professional Services (SMPS) San Francisco chapter. Her community involvement includes CANstruction, Rebuilding Together and Habitat for Humanity East Bay. Mergy received a bachelor's degree in interior design from San Francisco State University and attended UC Berkeley Extension and American University of London.

William Duff Architects delivers thoughtful, innovative architecture throughout the Bay Area and beyond. Founded in 1998 and located San Francisco, William Duff Architects finds inspiration in the talented people who live and work in our city and the region's embrace of sustainability. The firm's commitment to a culture that fosters curiosity, collaboration, and innovation drives its success across its residential, retail, and commercial practices.

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you run the risk of not selling the amount of work you need to sustain your business.

- **Collections.** There is a particular date when you have the highest probability of collecting any given account receivable based on your history with that specific client and/or client type. It's good to know this information so you can do accurate cash flow forecasting. And although we all live and die by cash flow – successful AEC firms and struggling firms alike – the majority don't do any forecasting that employs the historical collection data they have at their disposal.
- **Hiring.** There are certain probabilities that any given job offer we make as a company will be accepted. It is critical to understand these odds so we don't make the mistake of wasting too much time with one job candidate when we really need more than one to get the odds in our favor of having someone accept the offer. We see this situation all the time.

Yes, my friends, understanding probability theory is useful indeed. And even if you don't apply it to your business, knowing probabilities of success will at least keep you from buying scratch tickets or blowing your cash in a slot machine at a casino somewhere! ▀

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External engagements

Successful people will overcommit where their passion meets a purpose, where service is not a burden but a privilege.



**Stephen
Lucy**

BEST PRACTICES

If you are successful, your professional life will involve engaging in industry and community organizations, and I don't mean just attending industry functions. More than likely, you will be invited to serve on a steering committee, help to fundraise for a worthy cause, or even take the helm of a board that seeks your business advice and experience.

When the commitment requests start arriving, do you accept them – all of them? Or do you step back and gauge the energy and focus that will be required to help?

For those of us in leadership positions, we have come to accept these invitations to serve as a function of doing business in a community. Ego is one of the drivers that encourages us to jump in and get going, but ego may also be the demon that has to be fed.

If you visit with other firm leaders, this is the one conversation that comes up a lot. Typically, it begins with how hectic and difficult their schedules are. Yet when you break down the discussion, it is almost always about the

extracurricular engagements that demand so much of our time.

“When the commitment requests start arriving, do you accept them – all of them?”

SO WHY DO WE EMBRACE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT? There are benefits. Most firm leaders who embrace community involvement are helping to build a better brand. External engagement in industry committees often leads to a broader, more inclusive and dynamic network of contacts, too. Plus, there is

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STEPHEN LUCY, from page 3

the experience of collaborating with others within and outside the industry that leads to both personal and professional development.

Of course, a great deal of energy and time are required to dedicate yourself to various organizations. For example, one of our Fort Worth leaders has been involved with the International Concrete Repair Institute Inc. locally for decades, and, progressively, has assumed more responsibility and contributed his time to the success of this trade organization. At age 63, he is now president-elect of the national ICRI organization. That's quite a high level of commitment, but he has spent decades involved in an organization that has become his personal passion.

WHEN DO YOU SAY "NO?" Overextending yourself may be a driver of your firm's success and visibility, but when you commit to too many things, you run the risk of not being successful at all. Overcommitment means not accepting dozens of invitations to participate in numerous organizations but, rather, narrowing your focus so that your engagement is both meaningful and fulfilling to you as a professional and as a leader.

Of course, selfless service or sacrificial giving has to be something you put into it, other than just showing up to an event. A commitment to any organization means that you are doing things to help drive the success of that organization or event.

By examining your schedule and estimating the hours you contribute to external affairs, you will have a much better idea of what is needed to find a balance between involvement and disengagement. Factor in those things that you do best. Then match them to the organization's needs and determine whether or not your skills are being put to their best use. If not, identify someone else on your team who might benefit from this engagement. Invite him or her to get involved, and, if he or she does, you'll be able to mentor them to success as well as having expanded their network of business and community contacts. Disengagement of this kind can become a "win-win" for both you and the organization that seeks your firm's support.

EMBRACING COMMITMENT WITH A PASSION. One of the most important elements of committing to any external activity seems to be guided by a passionate focus on the goals of that organization.

This is particularly true when it comes to engaging millennials. To commit to both work and external involvement requires a balance between work and life because millennials do not want to become so overcommitted that they believe their personal lives are just an extension of job-related responsibilities.

Understanding what their passions or hot buttons are enables them to find an avenue for engagement. As our workforce diversifies, understanding how we can facilitate engagement that strikes a balance and enables millennials to follow their passion become equally important criteria to fill.

For our female engineers, we recognize the value

of participating in regional and national leadership conferences that are geared toward helping to support their career success. By identifying seminars and conferences that align with specific gender issues, we have found greater interest and support as they build solid career paths, and we readily cover their expenses and time off to develop the skills and insights needed to lead.

GETTING GRADED BY HOW INVOLVED YOU ARE. We want to engage in community activities, and we often gauge leadership potential by those who are willing to take on extracurricular activities. But should we also grade them? Some firms include this criteria in their formal evaluation process which then becomes a way of assessing promotions and raises. I am not sure I believe that is the best way to encourage external participation because such incentives may lead to overcommitment which can affect productivity and longevity at a job.

"The effort you make to encourage, underwrite and appreciate your future and current leaders' engagements will translate into loyalty and productivity, and may help you free up your schedule by bringing them into those organizations that match their interests and talents."

WHAT IS THE HAPPY MEDIUM? Jack Kornfield, in *Buddha's Little Instruction Book*, says, "The trouble is, you think you have time." Most of us would agree that by putting things off, we may never get around to them. The same might be said that by doing everything and packing our schedules with nonstop commitments, we may never do anything completely or at our best.

While organizations value our commitment and energy, we may wear ourselves out so that poor health or lost opportunities for our firm are the net result. For this, we should take a cue from those millennials who demand a work/life balance that incorporates one or two outside commitments for which they are most passionate. The rest of the time, they would prefer to spend it wisely with productive work lives that ensure career success and equally productive down time with their families.

DO ANY OF US BLAME THEM FOR THAT? At the end of the day, successful people will overcommit where their passion meets a purpose, where engagement is not a burden but a privilege.

Striving to support your team's involvement with balance, both professionally and in the community, will pay back many fold to the company. The effort you make to encourage, underwrite, and appreciate your future and current leaders' engagements will translate into loyalty and productivity, and may help you free up your schedule by bringing them into those organizations that match their interests and talents. ▀

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PROFILE



Incredibly grateful: Megan Armendariz

A good attitude and honest effort are central to California engineer's mission to build a meaningful career.

By RICHARD MASSEY
Editor

Megan Armendariz is an engineer from Clovis, California. A member of the team at TETER since 2014, the 29-year-old has a master's in structural engineering from Stanford University. She married her prom date from high school, John Armendariz, who, like her, studied civil engineering at Fresno State. Her favorite movie is *Remember the Titans*, the last book she read is *Everybody, Always* by Bob Goff, and if she's listening to the radio and hears an old Beach Boys song – or even something by a '90s boy band – that's a good thing because it brings back fond childhood memories. If you ask her, she'll tell you: Her parents gave her the self-belief she needed to be successful. A soccer enthusiast who once considered going to school to become a veterinarian, Armendariz is one of those people who gives back to society.

"Ultimately, I want to make the world, or at least someone's world, better in whatever time I'm given," she says. "I want to serve, love, and encourage as many people (or adorable animals) as I can."

A CONVERSATION WITH MEGAN ARMENDARIZ.

The Zweig Letter: What's the best advice you can give to an architect or engineer at the beginning of their career?

Megan Armendariz: Understand the "why" behind what you are doing. Ask questions to understand the purpose of whatever task you're given and how it impacts the overall project. Whether you're picking up red marks, or going out to a job site to observe how designs translate in the field, ask questions from the experts around you to better understand the reasoning behind the decisions that were made, so you will then be able to apply the best solution when you find yourself in a similar situation on a different project. However, more important than developing your technical knowledge, understand the "why" as it relates to why you do what you do every day. At the end of the day, what truly motivates you? Understanding this "why" will give you an intention and deeper purpose, and will motivate you to do the very best you can every day.

TZL: Back in 2011, when you first entered the AEC industry, what was your biggest challenge and how did you overcome it?

MA: Like many interns, I had to learn how to relate to real-world challenges. In our profession, no two projects are identical, so I had to learn how to apply those foundational concepts and problem-solving skills to each individual situation, and to convey those solutions in a set of documents that could actually be used in construction. The satisfaction of solving these problems was similar to college; only this time, instead of a letter grade, the reward was a building; better than an individual accomplishment, it was a positive impact on a community.

TZL: On the other hand, what was easier than you thought it would be?

MA: The transition from classmates to co-workers was easier than expected. In college, we worked together to make it through one of the most rigorous majors we could have chosen. Entering the industry, I was pleased to find the same collaborative mentality, with everyone coming together to solve exceedingly difficult problems, and come up with the best solutions possible. I wasn't treated as an intern or rookie, but rather as a valued member of the team. My peers and leaders respected my perspective and supported me in the transition to the industry.

“I think our generation wants to be a part of something bigger than ourselves. We want to ensure that what we do every day, including our careers, has a positive effect on our world.”

TZL: What do today's CEOs and firm leaders need to know about the younger generation?

MA: In my experience with my peers, I think our generation wants to be a part of something bigger than ourselves. We want to ensure that what we do every day, including our careers, has a positive effect on our world. Through our projects, we want to create solutions that are meaningful, conscious of their environmental impact, and will make communities better for the current and future generations. Beyond our professional work, I think many of us also like to be hands-on in making an impact, and gravitate toward a company that shares this desire.

TZL: What is the biggest mistake you've made and what was the lesson learned?

MA: In general, one of my biggest mistakes has been a lack of confidence. I've always had nothing but the greatest support system my entire life. Yet, when I jumped into my career, or even my first quarter in graduate school, I was intimidated. You feel as though you are surrounded by geniuses who know everything and it can be hard to think that you can ever reach their level of expertise and understanding. The learning curve is so steep when we enter our careers and we know we don't have all the answers. However, recognizing that lack of confidence was only going to hinder my potential and keep me from reaching all that I could become

has made me work even harder to improve. I've found solace in recognizing that this industry is ever-changing, that we will always be learning, and that I'm also surrounded by selfless experts eager to share their knowledge and mentor me along this journey.

TZL: There's an increasing interest in the business side of the AEC business. Do you think the college curriculum could use a few non-technical courses? If so, what are your recommendations?

MA: I think it is very important for everyone to understand the basics of business and how a firm operates as a whole. The more the individuals in a firm understand how we each play a role in the overall success of a business, the more capable we are in helping the firm run effectively. At my first internship, I was fortunate enough to gain some experience in the financial aspects of the company, assisting with payroll, billings, and taxes, among other office management duties. This exposure stoked my interest in business and led me to enroll in an accounting course during graduate school, which introduced me to assets, liabilities, and the many other considerations of operating a business. In my current position, these principles have helped me manage projects and understand the associated financials. I certainly don't claim to be a business expert (far from it), but I hope to continue my growth in this area, as I realize how crucial it is to the financial health of individual projects and the company as a whole. In addition to business courses, other valuable courses would introduce students to soft skills, like communication, leadership, and project-solving skills. The AEC industry, like many others, is based on much more than technical abilities. The more you can supplement your technical knowledge with business savvy and soft skills, the better.

TZL: You received TETER's 2018 Be Inspirational award for your work ethic and ability to finish a project. Describe being honored by your peers and how the celebration fits into the company's culture.

MA: First, I was extremely humbled, and also a bit shocked to receive this award, as I am surrounded by peers who inspire me on a daily basis. “Teople” are the heart of TETER, and we all strive to be EPIC (exceptional, professional, inspirational, and connected to each other, our community, and our clients). These core values drive the work we do. Everyone from our youngest interns fresh out of college and eager to contribute, to the servant leaders among our partners, associates, and veteran staff, exhibit these values, and I am grateful to be among colleagues who are as compassionate and selfless as they are hard-working and dedicated. That's what makes this peer-voted award so meaningful and special to me, as it comes from those who daily demonstrate what it means to “Be EPIC.”

TZL: Volunteering at an animal shelter. Mentoring high school students. Youth soccer and summer camp. What drives the philanthropic side of your life?

MA: I know I wouldn't be in the position I am today without the mentorship and encouragement I received from my parents, friends, co-workers, professors, and coaches who took the time to help me grow, and who continue to help me today. I am incredibly grateful for those who have invested

See INCREDIBLY GRATEFUL, page 8



INCREDIBLY GRATEFUL, from page 7

in me, and I want to do all I can to pass that along. Plus, many of the activities simply bring great joy to my life. Soccer is and always has been one of my greatest passions, and I treasure any chance I get to share the love of the game with the next generation. I get to watch them build that camaraderie, learn the life lessons that come with playing sports, and develop relationships that may last a lifetime. Mentoring high school students is also very rewarding, as I've always enjoyed school and learning, and now get to contribute to helping these students grow their passion. Ultimately, I want to make the world, or at least someone's world, better in whatever time I'm given. I want to serve, love, and encourage as many people (or adorable animals) as I can.

"I know I wouldn't be in the position I am today without the mentorship and encouragement I received from my parents, friends, co-workers, professors, and coaches who took the time to help me grow, and who continue to help me today. I am incredibly grateful for those who have invested in me, and I want to do all I can to pass that along."

TZL: TETER has crossed the 100-employee threshold and recently opened new offices in Modesto and San Luis Obispo. How has growth affected you specifically and the firm in general?

MA: Growth presents more opportunities for staff, including myself, to stretch ourselves and take on new roles. It also allows for more in-house development opportunities, like mentorship and training, which betters both our employees and our firm.

TZL: It seems like you have developed a specialty working on projects for public clients. What are the pros and cons of doing design work for public owners?

MA: My favorite part of working on public projects is the opportunity to serve the educators, students, and communities who will benefit from the work we do. Some of my childhood friends now work at the schools we've designed, or have children who attend them. In my experience, the public owners, whether school superintendents or government officials, have the same passion for serving their communities and providing them with the best facilities possible. They have great pride in their projects, and being able to help them make their dreams become reality is extremely rewarding.

TZL: What drove your decision to become an engineer in the first place? Was there ever a different career you wanted to pursue?

MA: Being an animal lover since I was a child, my heart was set on becoming a veterinarian, until I realized I'd have to face the reality of not being able to save every animal. Although soccer was a huge part of my youth, I think the practical side of me recognized that I was probably not going to have a lifelong career on the pitch. I loved art, but was also partial to the challenges presented in my math and science courses. Architecture seemed to be a perfect balance of my regard for both the left and right brain activities. However, I also had a mentor from an early age who is still the most passionate structural engineer I've ever met. He guided me through science fair projects about coefficients of friction and the thermal properties of wood, took me along on job sites, and most importantly, believed that I could become an engineer in a male-dominated field. His passion, along with my parents' constant encouragement and support of whatever I chose to do in life, helped lead me to engineering.

TZL: What's the most important thing you've ever learned from a mentor?

MA: While I have many great mentors in the industry who help me with everything from technical knowledge to workplace confidence, my greatest mentors have been my parents. They've taught me to believe in myself like they do, and have led by example in their own careers and in their roles as parents and life mentors. At a young age, I learned from them that there were two things I could always control – my attitude and my effort. This advice guides me in my profession and in all other aspects of my life. ▀



Silence of the MEPs

On the surface everything might appear to be fine, but back at their office, the consulting engineers might be telling the (painful) truth.



**Bill
Hodge**

**GUEST
SPEAKER**

In my 30 of years of serving as a mechanical, electrical, plumbing design professional, I've encountered some honest, admittedly cheeky, comments that you may never have heard from your MEP consulting engineers.

I share these things to help architects and MEP engineers have a better understanding and appreciation for our respective design endeavors.

- **We have no idea what you really do.** We MEP engineers think we know, but we really don't. We haven't had to market to building owners, layout a floorplan, evaluate life safety issues, estimate total building costs, etc. We don't know you have to be extremely knowledgeable about everything – including earthwork, drainage, landscaping, structural, MEPF, acoustics, constructability, sequencing, phasing, and more! We think you sit around all day and imagine ways to torture us. Because we look through a microscope at just our stuff all day, we don't get it. Please share with us the big picture stuff. Our MEP designs will be better for it.
- **My fee is directly proportional to how difficult you are to deal with.** It is personal. It changes over time. It changes with every person in your office. We

“Clear communication, a willingness to collaborate as often as necessary, plus some shared compassion for each other's expertise and daily challenges, will help all of us to create better projects for our clients.”

want to be transparent and collaborative; experience shows much better projects and reasonable fees will result. However, if you get inconsistent fees, this might explain why.

- **Your Revit model is not half as good as you think it is.** Your stairs aren't modeled properly. Your ceiling grid is wrong. You have rooms/walls on the wrong phase. You have copious amounts of detail

See BILL HODGE, page 10



ON THE MOVE

AMES & GOUGH APPOINTS MARGUERITE PARENT AS EQUITY PARTNER Ames & Gough, a leading insurance broker and risk management consultant, announced the appointment of Marguerite Parent as an equity partner of the firm.

“Ever since she joined Ames & Gough more than a decade ago, Marguerite has been an important driver in the development and growth of both our property/casualty business and the Boston office,” said Dan Knise, president and CEO, Ames & Gough. “We’re delighted to welcome her as an equity partner of the firm and look forward to her continued contributions and leadership in the years ahead.”

“Over the years, Marguerite has been a key participant in our business development and

client service teams in Boston,” added Brett Gough, head of the firm’s Boston operations. “Her steadfast commitment to providing exceptional client service and her extensive industry knowledge have helped us expand our relationships with many large design firm clients here in the Northeast and throughout the country. I’m pleased to join with the other partners in welcoming Marguerite as the newest member of our leadership team.”

A recognized expert on construction-related insurance matters, Parent has more than two decades of experience in insurance brokerage and risk management consulting. She joined Ames & Gough in 2006, after having served with William Gallagher Associates in Boston. Before that, she was an account manager with the Thomas E. Sears Insurance Agency.

A graduate of Northeastern University, she earned the Construction Risk & Insurance Specialist designation from the International Risk Management Institute.

With more than 1,500 architects, engineering firms, and other construction professionals of all sizes as clients, Ames & Gough is the leading insurance brokerage and risk consulting firm serving the needs of these professionals. Ames & Gough also has established itself as a committed, superior resource for law firms and associations and nonprofit organizations in need of professional liability, management liability, and property/casualty insurance and risk management assistance. Established in 1992, the firm has offices in Boston, New York City, Philadelphia, and Washington, D.C.

BILL HODGE, from page 9

lines. Your firewalls don’t go to deck. Look, we all want the model to be perfect, but we are human, so a little grace goes a long way to promote teamwork.

- **Every day I work on multiple projects.** We are probably not working on your project when you call. We can’t remember what we had for lunch yesterday, much less the size of the duct chase to the roof. We’ve answered at least 25 RFIs since answering yours, so grant us a little time finding the specific answer you seek. We will persist in finding the correct answer for you.
- **Your firm has no office standards.** Everyone in your office has their own, individual expectations about sheet layout, look, feel, timelines, definitions, specifications, expectations, correspondence, etc. It’s different with every person in your office. We try to remember the differences, but it’s impossible. So if something from us looks different from one project to the next, that’s probably why. Now might be the time to get your team on the same standards. If you ask us, we’ll give you some honest feedback on what works best.
- **Your favorite lighting rep is probably not my favorite.** We work with a lot of lighting reps and know from experience how well they respond to problems. We work on hundreds of projects each year, so we’ve seen all these reps at their best and worst.

Unless you need a specialized product or there is a good business reason, please don’t ask us to work with someone specifically. Let’s talk about this when the project kicks off.
- **When you take a long time to pay me, your projects get a lower priority.** You’ve probably experienced this yourself from your own customers. When you pay us soon, you’ll see how well “quick payment karma” makes things better all around.
- **I don’t start drawing until I think you’re finished messing with the floorplan.** Most of my front-end work is calculations, system selection, equipment selection, and site coordination, so your “percentage complete” will never match mine. Time is money, so don’t be that architect who is known for constantly changing their floorplan through the entire design schedule.
- **I’m convinced you look for new ways for me to lose**

money. Complicated layers, views, phases, and sheet layout all cost me money and don’t necessarily add value to a project. Referencing files on top of files makes updates an unnecessarily long process.

If you have certain expectations about these items and mandatory use of construction management packages (Newforma, Procore, BuilderTrend, etc.), let us know before we give you a fee proposal, so we’re both protected.

- **I don’t want to be involved at the beginning of your project, but I should be.** We don’t get excited about conceptual and schematic design meetings, but you need space for RPZs, mop sinks, water heaters, drinking fountains, switchgear, transformers, HVAC equipment, standpipes, fire risers, fire pumps, elevator sump containment barrels, etc. We can help. Getting involved early is not a waste of our time and it may prevent us all from “gotchas.”
- **I want to poke your structural engineer in the eye.** They don’t have to go to meetings, follow the production schedule, meet delivery dates, or share files with others. But we MEP folks must change our design to match their latest iteration. Their final drawings may or may not resemble any other version of their previous drawings. So it’s back to the drawing board for the MEP designers.
- **We pour our souls into your projects.** We have feelings, usually to a fault. When problems happen, we do take it personally. As we drive around the area, our family members can point out our projects. You can crush our spirits much more easily than you can imagine. However, kind words, a little praise, a little appreciation can motivate us far better than money. We’ll do our best to share praise and our appreciation of your efforts with you too.

Clear communication, a willingness to collaborate as often as necessary, plus some shared compassion for each other’s expertise and daily challenges, will help all of us to create better projects for our clients. In the end, that’s what matters the most. ▀

BILL HODGE is executive vice president at HP Engineering, Inc., a MEP company with four offices in Arkansas, Oklahoma, and Texas. Founded in 2007 by Hodge and his business partner, Brandon Pinkerton, HP Engineering serves architects, building owners, and construction professionals across the United States. Hodge can be reached at bill@hpengineeringinc.com.

OUR WORK & LIFE SEASONS WITH OUR GENERATIONS



Employee engagement (Part 4)

While management plays an obvious role in this process, employees must also do their part by knowing their roles and doing their jobs.



Peter Atherton

**GUEST
SPEAKER**

We know leaders, managers, and organizations need to work harder and do things differently to create conditions for more effective employee engagement, especially today. But it's not only about them. As employees, we play an equally vital role.

To be truly engaged, succeed, and live fully at the office and beyond, we need to:

- **Know what we want.** A high degree of self-awareness and emotional intelligence is not only needed to be an effective leader and manager, it is also needed to be an effective and engaged employee.

To win at both work and life as a professional we need a plan – and we need to design that plan to evolve as we grow and transition into new work and life seasons.

In general, we transition into new seasons as we progress through our life and career. At times, our seasons can either complement or conflict. Our interests and passions also change from season to season.

There are certainly generational differences in the workplace today, but there is also convergence, particularly around meaning, purpose, performance, and impact as a result of seasonal and societal shifts.

To stay engaged, it's important to map our seasons, understand our changes, and continually align our

“As employees at all levels, we need to know our roles and do our jobs to engage and connect with each other so we can continue to do great things through our work and beyond.”

actions with our goals and those of our team and organization.

- **Bring our best.** Employee engagement is a mutual commitment. Just as “a horse has to want to drink the water it's led to,” an employee has to want to be engaged. Employees must also take action.

The “10 Things That Require Zero Talent” list that runs through social media is a good proxy for that action: being on time, work ethic, effort, body language, energy, attitude, passion, being coachable, doing extra, and being prepared.

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ON THE MOVE

PFLUGER ARCHITECTS PROMOTES JESSICA MOLTER, AIA, LEED AP BD+C, AND ROBYN POPA, AIA, LEED AP, TO PARTNER

Jessica Molter and Robyn Popa first met at Washington University in St. Louis, each studying for master's degrees in architecture. Molter joined **Pfluger Architects** in 2005 followed by Popa in 2006. They are each the current presidents of their respective chapters of the Association for Learning Environments. And now, Pfluger Architects is pleased to announce the promotion of Molter and Popa to partner.

Molter works out of Pfluger's Austin office. She has developed a passion for sustainable building and advises clients and design teams on options for locally sourced materials and efficient building systems. This passion has resulted in many of her projects receiving

multiple awards for design and sustainability. One such project was the Austin ISD Performing Arts Center which achieved LEED Gold certification, earned a five-star rating from Austin Energy Green Building, and won five TASA | TASB Design Awards. Molter is the current President of the Central Texas Chapter of A4LE.

Since 2006, Popa has worked in Pfluger's San Antonio office. Her experience includes master planning, facility assessment, programming, design, production, and construction administration. She has worked on many award-winning projects, most notably Cibolo Green Elementary School for San Antonio's North East ISD. Cibolo Green was the first public school in Texas to achieve LEED Gold certification. It also won six TASA | TASB

awards, an Honorable Mention from the U.S. Green Building Council Balcones Chapter for Educational Design, and the Central Texas Masonry Contractors Association's Golden Trowel Award. Popa is the current president of the South Texas Chapter of A4LE.

Founded in Austin in 1973, Pfluger Architects plans and designs educational facilities that engage and inspire. With offices in Austin, Houston, and San Antonio, Pfluger has completed more than 450 projects totaling more than \$1 billion in the last five years alone. Pfluger is committed to the responsible use and management of energy and natural resources by recommending locally sourced products and efficient building systems that meet client needs and budgets.

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If we fall short, this is an opportunity to work with our supervisor to develop the skills, systems, and mindset needed to consistently bring our best. It can also be an opportunity to discuss resetting expectations to best accommodate a new season or a particular situation.

Evaluating how we measure up can also be a wake-up call. If we have lost ground on the "10 Things," that could be a sign we have drifted or are feeling the effects of prolonged workload, overwhelm, or burnout. This can be true for high-achieving professionals at all levels. When this is the case, we need to find a way to get back on the most appropriate track.

"Most AEC leaders and organizations strive to do excellent work with others committed to the same. They also seek to provide opportunities for growth and advancement in friendly, supportive, engaging, and even fun atmospheres."

■ **Control what we can.** If you are good at what you do and are dedicated, you will always be in demand. If you are a high-achiever, there will always be something to do.

To stay engaged and succeed without overwhelm and burnout, we need to control our time and energy.

When life seems out of control or misaligned, that is a cue to make more "margin" – quiet time and space to think, concentrate, contemplate, decompress, and plan. We need to design this time to make sure we are on-task with a better and more efficient "to-do" list with the right priorities, strategies, and sufficient boundaries to make them happen.

■ **Seek alignment.** Being in alignment is essential for employee engagement.

To be fully engaged, perform at our best, and sustain growth over the long-term, we must align with basic human needs and biology. Although this will adjust week-to-week, month-to-month, and season-to-season, we should generally align our 24-hour days and 168-hour weeks to be one-third work, one-third life, and one-third "margin" and restoration, including sleep.

Organizations have clients to serve and each of us has a role in serving them. To be effectively engaged, we must know that role. We must also understand how our organizations generate profit so we can best align with and enhance those processes and systems that lead to successful outcomes.

In addition to our day-to-day work tasks and responsibilities, we must also be aligned with the organization's mission, vision, and values.

Beyond an organization's "why", there is a who, what, when, where, and how that drives employee engagement. As employees, we need to understand what specific areas of our work are engaging, which may not be, and why. Doing so allows us to discuss any needs or concerns with our supervisor.

■ **Position for growth.** To stay engaged we must grow – both personally and professionally. We owe it to ourselves and to our organizations to grow.

As employees, are we taking advantage of all that's being offered? If not, we need to. Do we have ideas on what other opportunities or training could be beneficial? If so, we need to share them.

If after doing all the above we cannot find engagement, there just might not be a right "fit" at this time. In that case, a pivot away may be beneficial for all parties; however, that should be a last resort.

The fact is, most AEC leaders and organizations strive to do excellent work with others committed to the same. They also seek to provide opportunities for growth and advancement in friendly, supportive, engaging, and even fun atmospheres.

As employees at all levels, we need to know our roles and do our jobs to engage and connect with each other so we can continue to do great things through our work and beyond. ▀

PETER ATHERTON, P.E. is an industry insider having spent more than 20 years as a successful professional, principal, major owner, and member of the board of directors for a high-achieving AEC firm. Atherton is now the president and founder of ActionsProve, LLC, author of *Reversing Burnout: How to Immediately Engage Top Talent and Grow! A Blueprint for Professionals and Business Owners*, and the creator of the I.M.P.A.C.T. process. He can be reached at pete@actionsprove.com.