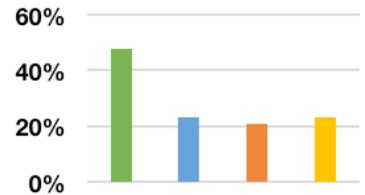


## TRENDLINES

### Working without a signed contract



According to Zweig Group's 2017 Fee & Billing Survey, fast-growth firms are taking more risk than firms in other growth categories. **Fast-growth** firms start almost half of their jobs without a signed contract in place, whereas **slow-growth**, **stable**, and **declining** firms start around 20 to 25 percent of their jobs without a signed contract.

**OPEN FOR PARTICIPATION**  
[zweiggroup.com/survey-participation/](http://zweiggroup.com/survey-participation/)

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## What is cheese?

“A lot of what you may be calling ‘marketing’ really isn’t marketing. It’s something else.”



Mark Zweig

### EDITORIAL

A lot of what people call “cheese” these days really isn’t. When you’re talking about Kraft Singles, or Velveeta, for example, you aren’t talking about cheese. You are instead talking about “pasteurized, processed cheese food.” It sort of approximates cheese but isn’t the real thing. Another example is what they call “bonded leather.” It’s really just vinyl.

So what’s the moral of the story?

A lot of what you may be calling “marketing” really isn’t marketing. It’s something else. And the problem with that is you could be doing these other things – thinking they are marketing activities – and then not doing other things that **ARE** actually marketing activities. As a result, you’re ineffective and your revenue (and profitability) go up and down like a yo-yo.

Here’s what I mean:

- **The Monday morning marketing meeting where you talk about proposals made and proposals to come.** This isn’t about marketing. It’s about selling work. No real marketing here at all.
- **The sponsorship of your local little league baseball team.** Again – not marketing. This is more “community relations” kind of stuff. Not to say it can’t help your image but it’s a long way from marketing.
- **Who’s going to call on whom for work?** This is part of business development. A separate and distinct activity. Important but not really “marketing” in the purest sense. Selling work is so much easier if your company name is familiar to your prospects **AND** associated with

See MARK ZWEIG, page 2

## MORE COLUMNS

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# Conference call: John Beasley

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## IN MEMORIAM

**ALLAN SHAPIRO** *He would often introduce himself, always with a twinkle in his eyes, as a famous historical figure. My favorite was the Chinese military ruler Chiang Kai-Shek. People never saw it coming, which he loved. He knew the Dalai Lama, or claimed to, and he probably did. He knew everybody. He spoke Turkish, and when I had the temerity to doubt him on this, he proved it by speaking in Turkish to a Turk, much to the young lady's delight. Expressions of delight were common to those whose path he crossed.*

*In fact, delight followed him like, to paraphrase the Buddha, a shadow that never left him. He delighted in telling tales of his dad's farm in Northern Kentucky, his football prowess at Walnut Hills High School (he was maybe 5'9" and 150 pounds, without his hat) in Cincinnati and his multitudinous children and grandchildren. He was, to use his own word, incorrigible. Incessant. Unmanageable and untrainable. He cheerfully acknowledged making everyone around him crazy at some point, and none more so than his lovely wife Mary. He talked about Mary, well, incessantly. And fondly. I had the chance to share a meal with them together only once and it was ... delightful.*

*He mispronounced, misused, and made up words, often intentionally and always effortlessly. If he was having trouble sleeping, he would say that he was an "insomaniac." Of a loquacious person, a "blubbermouth." His correspondence with me was charmingly clipped; an email with no subject line, containing a single word: "call." Or his last one to me: "Fading. But still kicking." His favorite congratulatory exclamation: "Bravo!" Everyone liked getting a bravo!*

*His words were rarely negative. I never heard a vulgar expression or a sour word come from him about anyone. The best he could muster – and I only heard this one time – was "that stupid guy." He was sunny-side up almost every day I ever spoke to or heard from him, even when that day was not going well. Even those who resisted him or became exasperated with him were met with friendly fellowship. It seemed to make no*

*difference to him whether the circumstance was better or worse, the person friend or foe; he marched on just the same way all the time.*

*He was an architect, educated at Cornell University, and an amateur archaeologist. He went on digs in the Middle East. He designed airport terminals. He led big design teams. He worked around the world. He supported and furthered the careers of countless people, including mine. He was extraordinarily well-read, a citizen of the world and a thoughtful observer of any scene, large or small. He wore a hat all the time, an accountment for which he became well-known and instantly recognizable. It was often an Orvis number, although he once told me he owned hundreds of hats. He introduced me to his favorite hat merchant, a large sweaty fellow called Meyer the Hatter, in New Orleans. I bought the straw hat right off Meyer the Hatter's head.*

*When he worked in Manhattan, near Penn Station, he took me to the Stage Door Delicatessen and we ate the most obnoxious corned beef sandwiches ever created. It was a raucous New York scene and there he was, right in the middle of it, enjoying every bite and minute.*

*I'm studying his Facebook page, where friends and relatives are beginning to both mourn and celebrate this extraordinary man. Everything is in order – pictures of him and his family in various stages, some personal details about him – and then there it is: "Lives: Nome Alaska." A laugh bubbles up through the sadness. His last twinkling moment with us.*

*He was an original. A one-of-a-kind fellow. He was like nobody else I've met before and will ever meet again. He was remarkable, memorable, influential, and, yes, incorrigible. He was my rabbi.*

*He was Allan Shapiro and my world is not the same without him.*

—David Kipp, Vice President of Technology Services, **Burns Engineering, Inc.**

MARK ZWEIG, from page 1

doing good work for clients. And that comes from marketing.

- **The open house celebrating 30 years of being in business.** Yes, it is nice to have a party. Everyone likes free food and drink. Your employees, vendors, sub-consultants, former employees, and competitors will all enjoy it. Your clients, on the other hand, may not even show up! I'd call this community relations.
- **The company holiday card.** I don't know about you but the amount of time and money spent on these cards seems like a waste. I don't think they do any good at all from a marketing standpoint. Consider putting them in the "client maintenance" category.

**Cheese is cheese. It's not pasteurized, processed cheese food. Maybe it's time you stopped serving "cheese food" and started eating real cheese at your place. Everyone has got to spend more on marketing IF they want to grow and do well in this competitive economy. ▀**

MARK ZWEIG is Zweig Group's chairman and founder. Contact him at [mzweig@zweiggroup.com](mailto:mzweig@zweiggroup.com).



[thezweigletter.com/category/podcast/](http://thezweigletter.com/category/podcast/)

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## Rejection theory

Live with rejection, learn from rejection, and conquer your fear of rejection. Once all that's out of the way, prepare to win!



**Christina  
Zweig  
Niehues**

**MARKETING  
MATTERS**



**A**re you afraid to put yourself out there? Are you afraid of the pain of rejection? No, I am not talking about asking someone out on a date. I am talking about the fear of losing that leads to major lost opportunities in your career and for your firm. Fear of rejection leads many A/E/P and environmental industry firms down an equally dangerous path of stagnation.

I get it; no one likes to be told "no." A lost job can feel like a major blow to your ego, especially if you put in a great deal of work to try to win it. A rejected proposal can feel like someone saying, "You're not good enough," or, "You don't have enough talent."

If you get rejected a lot, you may start to feel like it's not worth it to put much time or effort into pursuing the next new job. You might start to feel like your firm's work is mid-rate, or that you aren't as good as your competitor. If you let this fear

control you, your work is going to get worse, your list of clients will shrink, you'll be less creative, way less fun, and you'll lose even more jobs!

I recently read an article about Jason Comely, a freelance IT guy from Ontario. Comely's wife left him and he became a withdrawn, downtrodden guy who generally avoided talking to people. He realized he was consumed by his fear and afraid of rejection.

See CHRISTINA ZWEIG NIEHUES, page 4

## ON THE MOVE

### LPA INC. NAMES FIRST NEW CEO IN 30 YEARS

Integrated design firm **LPA Inc.** has named Wendy Rogers, FAIA as chief executive officer, succeeding Robert Kupper, who served as CEO of the company for 30 years. Rogers becomes only the second CEO in the national firm's more than 50-year history.

Rogers moves into her new role at a time of steady expansion for LPA, a fully-integrated practice with architecture, interior design, landscape, and engineering services.

Kupper remains with the company in an advisory role and will continue to work with the management team daily.

"It will be a privilege to build on Bob's legacy," said Rogers, who has spent the last two years as chief talent officer and the last 18 years as principal since joining the firm in 1987. "Bob has helped instill a collaborative work ethic, focused on problem-solving and creating sustainable places that enrich lives."

With more than 380 employees, LPA focuses on research-driven sustainable design, working across sectors, including education, civic, health care, and corporate projects. The firm opened an office in Dallas in April –

it's sixth location nationwide and second in Texas.

A Fellow of the American Institute of Architects, Rogers has been a vocal advocate for sustainable design, using research to support green design principles and strategies. Her initial priorities as CEO include increasing the role of LPA's proprietary research unit, LPAred, and using LPA's unique informed design approach to differentiate the design firm in the marketplace.

"My goal is to preserve an environment that inspires and challenges the brightest talent to do their best work," Rogers said.

Rogers will work with LPA president Dan Heinfeld on leading the day-to-day operations of the company. Heinfeld has served as president of LPA since 1986.

"Wendy has a strong sensibility that balances the business practice of the firm with the fundamental belief that design can change lives," said Heinfeld. "These are exciting times at LPA and Wendy's collaborative leadership approach will be a catalyst in making our firm better."

The CEO transition has been planned for several years, according to Kupper. "Wendy has shown her ability as a design professional

and as a leader," Kupper said. "She is a collaborator."

Under Kupper's leadership, LPA grew as a diverse design firm, developing a firmwide focus on sustainability and innovation. The company has grown and thrived during many development cycles.

The influence of Kupper's leadership "can be seen in every strand of this company's DNA," Rogers said. "Bob started his career as a project designer at LPA and he applied that same intelligent problem-solving discipline to running a firm. He has truly demonstrated what it is to lead a company sustainably."

LPA's revenue has increased by 20 percent since 2015 with plans to continue expansion in additional regions in the future. Some of the firm's current projects include Mazda Motor Corporation's headquarters in Irvine, California; Silicon Valley's technology-based STEM school, TIDE Academy; and the recently certified LEED Silver Monarch Center at Los Angeles Valley College.

Founded in 1965, LPA has offices in Irvine, Sacramento, San Diego, and San Jose, California, along with San Antonio and Dallas.

CHRISTINA ZWEIG NIEHUES, from page 3

For some reason, he started thinking about the Spetsnaz, an elite Russian military unit with a really intense training program designed to equip someone to handle almost any kind of scenario. He decided to use the rigorous approach of the Spetsnaz to conquer his own fear of rejection, and thus, the concept of "Rejection Therapy" was born.

Comely decided he had to get rejected at least once a day by someone in order to desensitize himself to those feelings of fear and dread.

What Comely was really doing was using the psychotherapy technique of flooding, or exposure therapy. Using this technique, a person is exposed to the thing they fear over and over again, eventually realizing that their fear isn't hurting them.

"If you get rejected a lot, you may start to feel like it's not worth it to put much time or effort into pursuing the next new job. You might start to feel like your firm's work is mid-rate, or that you aren't as good as your competitor."

Comely started doing some pretty funny things in order to get rejected, such as offering to do a stranger's laundry and making outrageous requests such as asking to speak over the intercom at Costco, demanding a "burger refill,"

or trying to get a car tire dry cleaned. He started feeling a sense of relief and accomplishment when he was rejected.

"If you let this fear control you, your work is going to get worse, your list of clients will shrink, you'll be less creative, way less fun, and you'll lose even more jobs!"

Eventually he compiled a long list of humorous ways to get rejected. Comely commercialized this concept with a rejection challenge game and rejection therapy cards, which challenge participants to get rejected by pursuing dead-end efforts. Today, you can actually buy his game online for around \$15.

I am not asking you go out and buy this game, and I certainly don't recommend submitting a ton of proposals you know will get rejected. But I am asking you to look at yourself and your firm and address the ways in which fear may be limiting your options.

If you have a 50 percent win rate and want to increase your revenue, you're going to have to send out more proposals. That's going to result in more rejection. But you should learn from it, relish it – and then move on. Recognize what you can gain from the possibility of a little more rejection. Take a few risks. Who knows, you might win a lot more than you expected! ▀

CHRISTINA ZWEIG NIEHUES is Zweig Group's director of marketing. Contact her at [christinaz@zweiggroup.com](mailto:christinaz@zweiggroup.com).

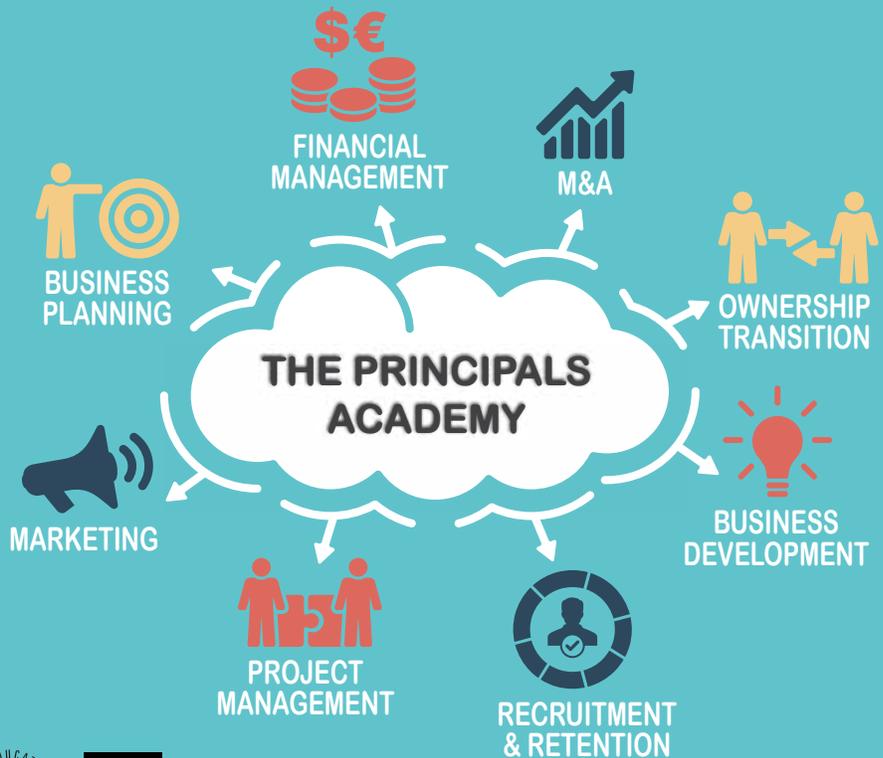
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# SP@TLIGHT ON: John

## PROFILE



## Conference call: John Beasley

President of Wakefield Beasley & Associates (Hot Firm #14 for 2016), a 165-person architectural design firm based in Alpharetta, Georgia.

By LIISA ANDREASSEN  
Correspondent



John Beasley,  
President,  
Wakefield  
Beasley &  
Associates

“We are a fast-paced, high-performance company, and underperformers are detrimental to the morale of our workforce and the quality of our services,” Beasley says.

### A CONVERSATION WITH JOHN BEASLEY.

**The Zweig Letter: In the event of failure, how does your firm react?**

**John Beasley:** The business of design is not a perfect process, and when failure occurs we pick up the pieces, pick up the phone, accept responsibility, resolve the issue as quickly as possible, and move on. We treat problems and resolutions as learning opportunities, and never reprimand or embarrass the guilty party. As in most business issues,

communication is critical. Informing the client that a problem exists, explaining how we are going to fix it, and following through to resolution gives us an opportunity to demonstrate our professional ethics and strengthen our relationship.

**TZL: Monthly happy hours and dog-friendly offices. What do today’s CEOs need to know about today’s workforce?**

**JB:** While I am a baby boomer, and we have other silverbacks in our company, overall we have a young workforce. Our average age companywide is 42, including a significant number of millennials. Today’s workforce is experiencing such rapid change in technology and the way business is done, and the next generation will undoubtedly be totally different. Culture is the glue that holds creative companies together, and providing a collaborative





atmosphere, allowing flexibility in work/life schedules, sharing company information, creating opportunities for personal and professional growth, and rewarding performance over tenure are all important to today's workforce.

“Culture is the glue that holds creative companies together, and providing a collaborative atmosphere, allowing flexibility in work/life schedules, sharing company information, creating opportunities for personal and professional growth, and rewarding performance over tenure are all important to today's workforce.”

**TZL: The talent war in the A/E industry is here. What steps do you take to create the leadership pipeline needed to retain your top people and not lose them to other firms?**

**JB:** The best way to retain our top people has been to create a company that they don't want to leave. Our culture includes open and honest communication about the company, both good and bad, operational and financial. We empower key people to make important decisions, without having to call special meetings or waste time. We respect and support the desired career paths of our top people, and provide mentorship and training in skills that they want and we know they will need to lead the company. We pay above industry average salaries and bonuses, and promote on performance, not tenure. Identifying future leaders early in their careers has been very important to our growth and success, and while we occasionally lose a key person to another firm, our retention record for top people has been excellent.

**TZL: The A/E market is great right now. What are you doing to cushion your firm in the event of a downturn?**

**JB:** Prior to the Great Recession, our practice was heavily based on developer projects, primarily retail, speculative office, and industrial. When these projects began to dwindle, we panicked and started chasing every project we could, whether or not we had experience in that project type, with minimal success. In order to qualify for projects outside of our realm of experience, we hired strong designers and managers in higher education, government, justice, multi-family, and hospitality projects. We opened branch offices here and abroad. Diversity in the types of projects we design and clients we serve pulled us out of the recession and helped us grow as the economy turned around. When the next recession comes, and it will, we feel well positioned to adjust to market conditions.

**TZL: How do you deal with underperforming employees? What are your steps for removal after they have**

**proven to be ineffective, or even counterproductive, to your firm?**

**JB:** We have clear disciplinary standards and apply them uniformly, but underperforming employees are a difficult issue, especially with the shortage of labor in our industry. We will give underperformers verbal and written evaluations explaining specific areas where they are not meeting our expectations. We give the employee a reasonable amount of time to respond and correct the problems. Should they fail to respond to our evaluation, we will terminate the employee. We are a fast-paced, high-performance company, and underperformers are detrimental to the morale of our work force and the quality of our services.

**TZL: Firms that have principals and firm owners that lower their compensation and invest back into the firm perform better, grow quicker, and have higher valuations. How do you balance owner compensation with investment in the firm?**

**JB:** While the two founding principals of the company have base compensation higher than the others, those principals have lower than industry average salaries but are entitled to a percentage of profits for the studios which they lead. Each year the principals meet to decide on the percentage of overall corporate profit which will remain in the company, and not be subject to distribution to shareholders. This percentage changes annually based on company performance, projected capital requirements, economic conditions, etc. The true compensation for our principals is measured in the increase in value of their stock.

“Identifying future leaders early in their careers has been very important to our growth and success, and while we occasionally lose a key person to another firm, our retention record for top people has been excellent.”

**TZL: How does marketing contribute to your success rate? Are you content with your marketing efforts, or do you think you should increase/decrease marketing?**

**JB:** Business is changing so fast now that I don't see how anyone can be content with their marketing efforts! We are constantly striving to increase our marketing. We see a direct correlation between our marketing efforts and our success rate, and this year we added two additional full time business development managers to nurture existing client relationships and develop new client relationships in all of the markets we serve. Hiring an outside consultant to handle our social media program has been a great decision, and we are seeing positive market awareness across several platforms we had

See CONFERENCE CALL, page 8

## TRANSACTIONS

**JACOBS APPOINTS GARY MANDEL TO LEAD INTEGRATION OF NEWLY ANNOUNCED CH2M ACQUISITION; VINAYAK PAI APPOINTED JACOBS' INTERIM HEAD OF GLOBAL PETROLEUM & CHEMICALS** Jacobs Engineering Group Inc., as part of the separately announced acquisition of **CH2M HILL Companies Ltd.**, has formed an Integration Management Office to oversee the integration of Jacobs and CH2M. The IMO will be jointly led on a full-time, dedicated basis by senior executives from both companies. Gary Mandel, who joined Jacobs six years ago through the Aker Solutions Process and Construction acquisition, and most recently served as Jacobs president of Petroleum and Chemicals, has been appointed to lead the integration for Jacobs. In addition, Jacobs announced that Vinayak Pai has been appointed interim head of global Petroleum and Chemicals.

"I have the greatest confidence in these accomplished executives in their new roles," said Steve Demetriou, Jacobs chairman and chief executive officer. "Gary's previous leadership responsibilities over a 35 year

career, including his extensive experience in infrastructure and government services, coupled with the fact that he has successfully navigated many global acquisitions and integrations make him a great fit for this new role."

"We also extend our appreciation to Vinayak for taking on these expanded responsibilities. Vinayak's deep experience in the oil and gas, refining and chemical industries position him well to lead the P&C business on an interim basis."

Previously, Mandel served as president of Jacobs' global P&C business serving clients in the oil and gas, refining and chemicals market sectors – offering a full range of consulting, PMC, EPC and EPCm services. He also led Jacobs' global Mining and Minerals business. As a result of Jacobs' acquisition of Aker Solutions Process and Construction business in 2011, Mandel joined Jacobs as executive vice president of Operations overseeing various global portfolios including, upstream and downstream oil and gas business, as well as the heavy process, biopharma,

infrastructure, consulting, module fabrication, specialty chemicals and mining and minerals markets. Prior to joining Jacobs, Mandel served as executive vice president for Aker Solutions, overseeing their oil and gas, process, energy and government services business. Mandel also spent 15 years at Brown and Root in various project leadership roles for the global construction, engineering and maintenance company.

Previously, Pai served as senior vice president Global Operations for Jacobs' P&C business with responsibility for global integrated delivery and EPC and EPCm project delivery excellence globally. Pai, who joined Jacobs in 2013, has more than 28 years of experience in the oil and gas and petrochemical industry, with extensive experience in executing upstream and downstream projects. Pai received an executive MBA from IIT Mumbai, a post graduate in management from Symbiosis Institute in Pune, India and holds an Engineering degree from the College of Engineering in Pune.

CONFERENCE CALL, from page 7

previously been ignoring. We have conducted several creative marketing campaigns this year with good results, and plan to have more as some high profile projects we designed are being completed. Increase marketing? Yes!

**TZL: If there was one program, course, or degree program you could take or recommend before becoming a principal or owner, what would it be?**

**JB:** Besides the obvious degrees I should have pursued before starting our firm (MBA, J.D., and Ph.D.), a program in building interpersonal relationships would be a great asset for new principals in a design firm. So much of winning projects and maintaining a healthy work environment is based upon human interaction and communication. Once a client has selected a firm to design a project, nurturing the relationship and staying in position to win the client's next project and spread the word about the firm's quality and professionalism is critical to the design firm's reputation, growth, and success.

**TZL: What's the greatest challenge presented by growth?**

**JB:** Maintaining and protecting the brand we have created has been a big challenge as we have grown significantly over the past few years. Immersing new hires in the way we do business, including procedures and systems, is critical. Bringing new team members up to speed with evolving technologies has required heavy investment in infrastructure and training, but in doing so we are well prepared to continue our pattern of expanding into new markets and adding staff to meet our clients' needs.

**TZL: What is the role of entrepreneurship in your firm?**

**JB:** Hire the best people we can find and then get out of their way! That has been a key component for our company's success since its founding. We recruit for personality and train for skills. Our culture promotes and supports entrepreneurial behavior, thus giving our staff opportunities to increase firm profitability and their compensation. Gradually increasing responsibility has helped us identify future leaders and develop their entrepreneurial skills.

"Maintaining and protecting the brand we have created has been a big challenge as we have grown significantly over the past few years. Immersing new hires in the way we do business, including procedures and systems, is critical."

**TZL: What's your prediction for 2017 and for the next five years?**

**JB:** 2017 will be the best year in our 37-year history, as we have major projects in mixed-use, retail, office, multifamily, and hospitality. There are some headwinds, as labor is scarce, a recession is overdue, and Congress is gridlocked. But if corporate tax reform does happen this year, we see the potential for explosive growth over the next few years. While we are registered to practice in 34 states, most of our projects are located here in the southeast. We are headquartered in suburban Atlanta, my hometown, so I may be slightly prejudiced in my opinion, but corporate America wants to, has to be here, and being home to the world's busiest airport only enhances this city's and this region's desirability and potential for growth. ▀



## Core values

Company culture is about much more than the fun you have, the events you sponsor, time off, and cushy health benefits.



Stephen  
Lucy

### BEST PRACTICES

**O**ur personal core values are developed from an early age. For me, they were first defined by my parents and surrounding family. The Boy Scouts provided me with the 12 points of the Scout Law which gave tangible words to my values. Texas A&M University further defined my values through its institutional core values of respect, excellence, leadership, loyalty, integrity, and selfless service.

If you ask an individual what they believe in, most can provide you an answer. So why is it that as companies we struggle so much to define our cultures which are essentially our core values? And wouldn't the definition of our core values allow us to better operate our firms as we would have a common filter by which to evaluate our decisions?

So many times, we tend to reflect on the physical trappings of culture, not the culture itself. Likewise, it is often challenging to differentiate a firm on its technical skills or work product alone as everyone can prepare statements of qualification that infer his or her firm is the best. But if you can clearly define and live your core values which are the drivers of your firm's culture, you can differentiate yourself to your clients, staff and prospective staff.

"If you ask an individual what they believe in, most can provide you an answer. So why is it that as companies we struggle so much to define our cultures which are essentially our core values?"

Once defined, the struggle then becomes to maintain and nurture those values as they are the essence of your firm. To succeed at that, it is imperative that you start with the right personnel as missteps in the hiring process can immediately put your firm's culture at risk. Based on both the

See STEPHEN LUCY, page 10



# BUSINESS NEWS

## RED SEA HOUSING SERVICES AND AECOM SIGN MOU TO BRING FAST-TRACK MODULAR AFFORDABLE HOUSING SOLUTIONS TO SAUDI ARABIA

Red Sea Housing Services and AECOM signed a Memorandum of Understanding to collaborate in delivering innovative, modular affordable housing solutions on fast track basis for the Saudi Arabian market.

While Red Sea Housing Services will manufacture and deliver the modular building units from its factory, AECOM will undertake the responsibility for designing, engineering, planning, and project managing these housing projects.

Red Sea Housing Services' CEO, William Ali Mills stated that, "The collaboration between RSHS and AECOM will provide an ideal platform to deliver quality homes in the Kingdom in a fast and efficient manner using our state-of-the-art technology, at affordable prices."

This engagement brings together Red Sea Housing's modular construction expertise – an

innovative building technique that dramatically reduces construction time and delivers buildings at the highest levels of quality, with AECOM's expertise in sustainable and energy efficient construction solutions. Jointly the companies look to tackle the rising affordable housing crisis.

Currently, the companies have signed a 12-month MOU with the main objective of exploring housing opportunities presented by the Ministry of Housing in Saudi Arabia.

"We are delighted to have signed this MOU with Red Sea Housing Services", said Hamed Zaghaw, chief executive, AECOM Middle East, "By combining our knowledge of the local market, solutions for affordable housing, and our design and program management expertise, we will explore opportunities that support the priorities of the Ministry of Housing."

Red Sea Housing Services a global leader that provides high quality modular living and working environments for industrial and

residential communities. With significant experience in providing industrial housing products and services in remote and urban locations across the world in more than 65 countries for over four decades, RSHS has cemented exceptional reputation for designing, planning, producing, managing, leasing, and operating corporate housing solutions. RSHS sets up the infrastructure and facilities required for global companies to construct high quality, reliable, durable and tailored modular buildings, and housing units, including hotels, offices, accommodation units, utility services, telecommunications networks, catering and recreation facilities, from its manufacturing facilities in Saudi, UAE, Ghana, PNG, and Malaysia.

A Fortune 500 company, AECOM is the world's leading design firm. It provides professional technical services in the fields of engineering, consulting, planning, architecture, construction management, project management, asset management, and environmental services.

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successes and failures in our past hires, we have found that answers to the following seven questions help guide us in our hiring decisions.

### TOP SEVEN QUESTIONS FOR NEW HIRES:

**1) What has been the most important outside experience of your college life?** Although we all are looking for the stellar student with the 4.0 GPA, the value of the non-academic experience in determining future success of someone within your firm cannot be overlooked. Often the answer to this question helps us understand how socially adept that young graduate may be and how impactful they can be to those around them.

"If you strictly talk about the visible signs of your culture – the fun you have, the events you sponsor, the time off, or the health benefits – then you haven't defined your basic culture or core values."

**2) What are your life goals – not just your career goals?** Work-life balance is essential to good health and happiness. Seeking a balance also produces focused, productive team members who have plans, not just for their career but also for their community and family going forward.

**3) Which people at our firm would you like to talk to in order to better understand our work environment?** Giving candidates the opportunity to talk to their peers and those in leadership helps those candidates better understand how they will fit in. There are multiple generations within your workforce so understanding those differences is essential.

**4) What kind of leadership experiences and skills do you have?** An absence of interest in leading might be comfortable

to some firms, but most prefer individuals who want to grow, lead, and manage.

**5) What are your strengths and weaknesses?** How someone responds to an introspective question can tell you a lot about how they will work with others. You want someone who recognizes what they can and cannot do. You do not want someone who is so grandiose in their self-evaluation that they will only focus on themselves.

**6) What is your definition of teamwork?** Almost everything we do involves a diverse team environment. Your clients and consultants are also diverse teams. If you can't explain your experience in working with a team, then how can you succeed in the team sport of the AEC industry?

**7) What is your definition of work ethic?** This can be a hot topic as each generation thinks the next generation does not have a proper work ethic. In an interview years ago, the head coach of the women's basketball team at Texas Tech University was asked how he was able to sustain the success of his team. He explained that he recruited almost exclusively off the farms and ranches in the Midwest. To those players, sports was recreation and they had also experienced hard work firsthand. In fact, his top player at the time had grown up on a dairy farm, and, although basketball practice started at 6:30 a.m., she told the coach that this was the latest she had been able to sleep in her life. Ask that person the meaning of work ethic, and they can probably give you a very clear answer.

**BOTTOM-LINE.** Everything starts with your core values. If you strictly talk about the visible signs of your culture – the fun you have, the events you sponsor, the time off, or the health benefits – then you haven't defined your basic culture or core values. And if you do not get the staff in place that lives and breathes those core values, your firm is doomed to failure. ▀

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## The ‘strategy thing’

Can strategic thinking be learned? Sure, if you know where to start and are mindful of the mileposts along the way.



**Julie  
Benezet**

**GUEST  
SPEAKER**

**H**alfway through a two-day strategic planning retreat, a senior leadership team member nervously pulled me aside to make a painful confession. “I just can’t think strategically. I’m really good at running projects, but this strategy thing . . .”

Yes, that “strategy thing.” For many leaders, “strategy” is a thing from another planet. It lands during an offsite when one of those nasty consultants says, “Let’s create our strategic goals.” Or, it appears during a performance review, where you hear the words, “You have to move beyond the tactical. We need forward thinking strategies that take us into the future.”

“Forward thinking. . . Ummm . . .” The lights dim, and the “strategy thing” zooms back into space, leaving the leader stuck on the ground.

There are those for whom strategic thinking comes as naturally as breathing. Converting a current situation into a future opportunity arrives effortlessly. If a customer complains repeatedly that your product directions are obscure, the nonstrategic thinker focuses on repairing the

“In my work with leaders and strategy over many years, I have observed that if you cannot crack open the door by demystifying the concept of strategy, any attempt to swing the door wider fails.”

customer relationship. While important, it misses a vital opportunity. The strategic thinker looks beyond repairing the individual customer relationship to ask, “What might be missing in our system that is causing this recurrence?” Therein lies the difference.

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## ON THE MOVE

**COMPLETE TRANSPARENCY: BURNS & MCDONNELL KCI HOMETOWN TEAM RELEASES FULL PROPOSAL TO PUBLIC FOLLOWING PRESENTATION TO AIRPORT SELECTION COMMITTEE** The Burns & McDonnell KCI HOMETOWN Team made its final pitch to the Kansas City Airport Selection Committee today and afterward released the complete proposal package to the public.

“This process of renewing our hometown airport is immensely important to the people of Kansas City and we believe they have every right to review all the details of our proposal to the City,” said Ray Kowalik, chairman and CEO, Burns & McDonnell. “If we are fortunate enough to be selected, we will work with the City every step of the way

to make sure Kansas Citians understand how the new KCI will be designed, built and financed.”

The KCI HOMETOWN Team proposal includes the following key elements:

- Preferred alternative
- Aggressive schedule
- Competitive pricing
- Private financing
- Added convenience
- More Amenities
- Modernized gates
- Minority and women-owned business opportunities

Kowalik led the presentation team in the final stage of a competitive bid process for a new single-terminal at Kansas City International Airport.

“Our number one export in Kansas City is architecture, engineering and construction. The KCI HOMETOWN Team represents the best of the best in the industry,” Kowalik said. “We are incredibly proud of what our KCI HOMETOWN Team presented today. It’s a plan to makes sure KCI is done right – by Kansas Citians who know what special characteristics it needs to reflect our City’s personality and continued Renaissance. This is about KC pride.”

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What is strategic thinking? Strangely, it lacks a concise definition. In a blog post for Harvard Business Publishing Corporate Learning, Peter Walsh describes it as “thinking [that] goes beyond looking at what is – it imagines what could be.” He offers a test with several traits including, “future-based, curious, long-term focus, and willing to take risks.”

While I do not quibble with his characterization, for the many people who struggle with the meaning of strategy, these traits add more words in a foreign language. In my work with leaders and strategy over many years, I have observed that if you cannot crack open the door by demystifying the concept of strategy, any attempt to swing the door wider fails.

“The goal of strategy is to find new ideas that deliver long-term competitive value. Developing a strategy begins with two fundamental questions: what problem are you trying to solve and who are the stakeholders who will benefit from it being solved?”

A leader’s job is to make life better for a diversity of stakeholders, including customers, employees, and management teams. Making things better requires new ideas to address the needs of your stakeholder groups.

The goal of strategy is to find new ideas that deliver long-term competitive value. Developing a strategy begins with two fundamental questions: what problem are you trying to solve and who are the stakeholders who will benefit from it being solved?

Once you answer the who and what questions, you have opened the way to convert the needs of the “who” into ideas to make their lives better. You also create competitive advantage for your organization, which, simply put, is strategy.

Identifying the relevant stakeholders provides a target on which to focus your quest. Once you have identified your stakeholders, you can then burrow into their concerns. A roadmap appears, offering a route to follow towards making something better.

**HERE ARE SIX ESSENTIAL MILEPOSTS ALONG THIS ROAD:**

- 1) Identify the problem.** Choose an issue that needs a long-term solution.
- 2) Identify the relevant stakeholders.** Identify the group of persons affected by the issue – customers, management teams, shareholders, etc.
- 3) Collect the (real) facts.** Too often we assume we know how our stakeholders think and feel. It’s easier than getting cluttered by facts. The point of strategic thinking is to unearth the clutter. Go ask open-ended questions and be prepared to hear what you did not expect. Ask lots of follow-on questions. Assume you don’t know the answer, because chances are you don’t. That’s why there is a problem. Strategic ideas often arise from answers we did not anticipate.
- 4) Accept discomfort.** Learning unexpected new things can be uncomfortable. That’s good. It means you are asking the right questions.
- 5) Find core patterns.** Review the information you collected for themes and suggestions. What patterns unite them? Do they hate your product instructions because they are too complicated or is your company’s communication style condescending and user unfriendly?
- 6) Create and test ideas.** Armed with your stakeholders’ feedback, generate ideas you believe will address their concerns long term. Test them by going back to your stakeholders for more feedback. By flexing and learning from your stakeholders, you will discover the ideas that succeed.

These steps underlie strategic thinking and will start you on your way. ▀

JULIE BENEZET spent 25 years in law and business, and for the past 15 years coached and consulted with executives from virtually every industry. She earned her stripes for leading in the new and unknown as Amazon’s first global real estate executive. She is an award-winning author of *The Journey of Not Knowing: How 21st Century Leaders Can Chart a Course Where There Is None*. She can be reached at julie@juliebenezet.com.