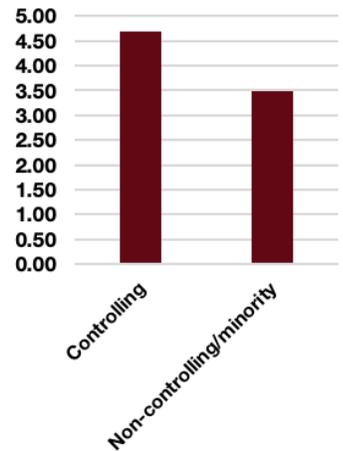


TRENDLINES

Equity value per profit



In Zweig Group's *2021 Valuation Report of AEC Firms*, the disparity in equity value per profit among valuations done on behalf of controlling owners (4.69) relative to those done on behalf of minority owners (3.48) is shown. Overall, valuations performed on behalf of the majority ownership resulted in value ratios that were 20 percent higher than valuations performed on behalf of the minority of non-controlling owners.

[Participate in a survey and save 50 percent on the final or pre-publication price of any Zweig Group research publication.](#)

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Will you be famous or infamous?

Actively work to shape your own legacy, otherwise it will be defined by others and probably not as positive as you want.



Stephen Lucy

As I get older, I find myself thinking about the legacy of my career. It is only natural to have such thoughts as invariably we want our impact and reputation to extend beyond our lives. However, if you only focus on your legacy at the end, you may have already missed many opportunities to make a real difference.

As leaders, our legacies are linked to the decisions we make and the leadership we show both within the firm and outwardly to the greater community. In the absence of defining your own legacy, it will be created or defined by others and will probably not be the positive legacy you want. Therefore, you should actively work to shape your legacy.

■ **Legacy is a journey, not an event.** You cannot just wake up one day and decide that you want to change, much less create, your legacy. As the totality of your career and your life will define your legacy, you need to have a life plan from day one. This is not to say that the plan may not change as it does need to evolve as your career advances and in response to opportunities along the way.

You must also be aware that the actions you take could potentially have long-term impacts on your life and career. This is especially true in today's technology-driven society, where almost all actions are documented and can come back to bite us later. If you are going to be an internet sensation, I hope you become one for all the right reasons.

■ **Make the right choices.** It is said that we are remembered most for how we dealt with a crisis. Did you run toward the problem and address it, or did you run away and hope someone else would deal with the issue? Similarly, in your day-to-day decision making, did you take the easy choice that may benefit yourself most directly, or did you make the right choice that provided the greater benefit to all those you lead? Also, hopefully the decision was made for the long-term benefit of the firm and not just a fleeting short-term gain.

There will always be some decisions made that turn out to be wrong. However, if you establish the correct metrics on which to base your decisions and if you consider the long-term needs of the entire organization when making those decisions, you will make more correct decisions than bad.

■ **Self-made people are rare.** I originally was going to state that self-made individuals are non-existent, but that may only reflect that I do not believe that I have ever met one. The vast majority of us got to where we are with the assistance of others or through opportunities created by others. As such, we need to acknowledge that assistance and then pay it forward to the next generation.

As a starting point, think back to all those times you were assisted and do the same for someone else. If you went to college through a scholarship funded by others, establish one yourself. If you had a

See STEPHEN LUCY, page 2

ON THE MOVE

ZWEIG GROUP ANNOUNCES NEW OWNERS Zweig Group, a global leader in products and services for the architecture, engineering, and environmental consulting industry, announced that Chad Coldiron, the firm's Director of Executive Search, Philip Keil, Director of Strategic Services, and Will Swearingen, Director of Ownership Transition, have joined the growing firm's ownership team.

Reflecting on his path to ownership at Zweig Group, Swearingen noted, "I am honored to have the opportunity to take a larger role in this organization. Mark Zweig started this company more than 30 years ago in Natick, Massachusetts. It has gone through a series of transitions in that time and seen plenty of ups and downs. Chad and Jamie Claire started a new generation of leadership here and I very much look forward to working alongside them to continue building the best management consulting and research firm in this industry."

Swearingen also commented on the parallelism of his own path to ownership with the services he offers his clients, "This brand, the products and the services that we deliver are all things I am passionate about. Being an owner here means a lot to me because my day job is to make this (ownership) opportunity a reality for architects and engineers [clients] across the U.S."

Coldiron emphasized, "Being provided this opportunity to help lead Zweig Group into the future is one of the greatest recognitions anyone in our industry can have. The amount of pride

this moment gives me is immeasurable. I'm looking forward to meeting the challenges with both clients and employees with the common goal of Elevating the Industry far into the future."

Echoing the other two new owners' sentiments, Keil added, "Partnership represents the next evolution of my ability to elevate our people. It furthers my personal drive for Zweig Group staff, the industry, and the larger communities we are involved in to be happy, fulfilled, and have the ability to realize their individual aspirations. This provides a larger platform to drive our purpose, performance, and to leave a lasting legacy."

Bios and contact information of the new owners can be found on [Zweig Group's website](#).

Zweig Group, three times on the Inc. 500/5000 list, is the industry leader and premiere authority in AEC firm management and marketing, the go-to source for data and research, and the leading provider of customized learning and training.

Zweig Group exists to help AEC firms succeed in a complicated and challenging marketplace through services that include: mergers and acquisitions, strategic planning, valuation, executive search, board of director services, ownership transition, marketing and branding, and business development training. The firm has offices in Dallas and Fayetteville, Arkansas. For more information visit [Zweig Group's website](#).

STEPHEN LUCY, from page 1

mentor, be a mentor to someone within your firm. If you were encouraged to join and participate in an organization, do the same for a professional peer. In most cases, it does not require a lot of input from you, but the assistance you provide can have a tremendously powerful impact on others.

■ **Servant leader vs. authoritarian.** If you look back in history, very few authoritarians are portrayed in a good light. As an authoritarian is typically focused on themselves and gaining control over those around them, it is hard to imagine that they will create a legacy that most would want to emulate. On the other hand, servant leaders understand that when they support and celebrate the victories of others, their own position is improved as others want to follow them. "A rising tide lifts all ships" is a much better form of leadership than "every man, woman, or child for themselves."

■ **Be consistent.** Creating a positive legacy requires consistency of action. You cannot be one person in the office and another outside within the community. Absent consistency, others will lose trust and question your motives. Yet, how many firm leaders do you know who are nice and supportive of their clients but ride roughshod over their employees? That attitude is not sustainable and will drive any employee with ability and an entrepreneurial spirit out of the firm. Do you want your legacy to be that you created multiple competitors or that you created multiple business partners?

WHAT IS YOUR LEGACY? Creating a positive legacy is possibly the most powerful action you can take in your career as it allows you to help shape both the present and future success of your firm. It is the culmination of one's work and will dictate how we are remembered. I hope that we all want to be famous for our accomplishments and not infamous for our failings. ▀

STEPHEN LUCY is CEO of JQ with offices in Austin, Dallas, Fort Worth, Houston, Lubbock and San Antonio, Texas. Contact him at slucy@jqeng.com.



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THE **ZWEIG** LETTER

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OPINION



Through the digital looking glass

With the vaccine rolling out and workers trickling back into offices, we need to determine what innovations we will carry forward and how we will continue to evolve.



**Alexandra
Pollock**

In 2017, the article “Imagining Construction’s Digital Future” by McKinsey & Company listed the AEC sector among the least digitized, ranking just above agriculture. However, the past year has proven that our industry has the ability to rank much higher and that we are in fact incredibly agile and adaptable when it comes to our technological future.

This pandemic has pushed our industry into the technological future that we were already working toward, but accelerated the trajectory out of necessity. COVID-19 transformed how we work, from huddles over trace paper and conversations over cups of coffee, to an alternate reality defined by digital interaction, screens, and Zoom conferences. In this alternate world, the pandemic has tested our resiliency and shown us that the AEC industry is able to embrace and thrive in a primarily digital world, which will be a major component of our future. With the vaccine rolling out and workers trickling back into offices, we now need to determine what lessons we take with us as an industry, what innovations we will carry forward, and how we will continue to evolve.

adopted the necessary digital collaboration tools in the weeks following the initial outbreak, a process that likely would have taken months, if not years, to accomplish with our industry’s traditionally slow pace. But the pandemic took away that choice, and everyone rose to the challenge. From virtual meeting and chat platforms, to collaborative PDFs, pin-up boards, and project notes, we’ve gained fluency in the digital facsimiles of our standard tools. That quick implementation has been a collective effort, and we saw an amazing reverse-mentoring occur organically with many emerging professionals – digital natives trained primarily through the use of technology – helping other colleagues learn and adapt. We also saw increased collaboration with our consultants, shortening the review cycle by

ADAPT AND INNOVATE – QUICKLY. Like many firms, FXCollaborative immediately embraced and

See ALEXANDRA POLLOCK, page 4



ON THE MOVE

ERIC BOSCHEN PROMOTED TO ASSOCIATE VICE PRESIDENT Dewberry, a privately held professional services firm, announced the promotion Eric Boschen, PE, who has been promoted to associate vice president in its Bloomfield, New Jersey, office.

Boschen is a manager in the water resources department with more than 30 years of experience. He has been involved in a wide range of projects related to hydraulic studies,

including stormwater management and flood control. His work includes hydrologic and hydraulic design of stormwater management facilities, including dams, bridges, culverts, and detention and bioretention basins along with storm sewer systems.

Boschen earned a bachelor's degree in civil engineering from the New Jersey Institute of Technology and is a professional engineer in Connecticut, New Jersey, and New York. He

is a member of the ASCE and was named Civil Engineer of the Year in 2019 by the ASCE North Jersey Branch.

Dewberry is a leading, market-facing firm with a history of providing professional services to a wide variety of public- and private-sector clients. Established in 1956, Dewberry is headquartered in Fairfax, Virginia, with more than 50 locations and more than 2,000 professionals nationwide.

ALEXANDRA POLLOCK, from page 3

coordinating and developing solutions in real-time rather than relying on weekly coordination meetings.

In order to scale and transform quickly, it is imperative that our industry and offices stay committed to our new role as technological innovators. One key lesson we learned early was that it is critical to keep abreast of the latest technology and to continually have small pockets of users pilot new technology. The pilots we conducted pre-shutdown allowed us to more quickly and effectively develop implementation workflows and best-practices. We were then able to easily scale and implement these practices firmwide, with a built-in set of experts ready and able to provide guidance. The future of our practice is dependent on turning the focus toward digital innovation to establish agile methodologies at an industry-scale so that firms can continue to digitally transform and adapt.

“Our increased adoption of digital collaboration tools and new perspective on the role of technology in the AEC industry has led to lessons and practices that can be carried through to whatever new future awaits us.”

EMBRACE AN INCLUSIVE FUTURE OF WORK. Although distance has made some forms of interactions more difficult, technology has helped democratize conversations and increase representation at the table. In Zoom or Microsoft Teams meetings, there is no head of the table; every tile is the same. The digital format also allows more people to be present and involved in the conversation – allowing more junior staff to attend client meetings, and more constituents to attend virtual community board meetings – which results in more input and perspectives earlier in the process. Virtual workflows have proven to foster more inclusion in the design process, allowing for more frequent meetings, higher attendance, and more opportunity for input. With the successes seen from these efficiencies, it is likely that future in-person meetings will continue to have a digital component to increase participation, representation, accessibility, and transparency.

Working remotely also opens up staffing possibilities. While a local presence will still be necessary for site visits, remote working gives firms the opportunity to hire

talent regardless of geography, and provides flexibility to local staff for a healthier work-life balance. Even for teams needing to review projects under construction, we have good success with virtual site visits led by the on-site contractor and using 360 degree photography to capture conditions that teams could then explore in detail remotely.

As staff begin to physically return to the office, the next challenge will be finding the best ways to support a hybrid workforce. Our industry needs to embrace and innovate on practicing in this “new normal” to ensure a seamless interaction between groups of in-person staff with remote individuals. Technology will continue to play a critical role in this, such as by connecting physical smartboards to remote-accessible collaborative platforms, incorporating videoconferencing cameras in meeting rooms – even smaller huddle rooms, and rethinking the format of in-person meetings to allow for virtual participation. There will also undoubtedly be greater attention given to firms’ technology infrastructure, with additional redundancy and resiliency measures, more technology-focused staff, and more training.

ADVANCE INDUSTRY-WIDE DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION. Despite the challenges and hardships, this past year has helped spark a change needed in our industry. It has created a new way of thinking wherein technology is not merely a tool, but is integral and indispensable. FXCollaborative’s integrated technology “Digital Practice” structure brings together experts that focus on design technology, business technology, IT, and data integration. This framework supports a performance-based, data-driven, and collaborative process, where we consider not only how BIM models function, but how we can capture data to feed sustainability, or how we can better leverage accounting data to influence project schedules and projections. Technology will help us holistically improve design, building, firm, industry, and collaboration efficiencies.

We have gained an awareness that we can adapt and move quickly. Now, there needs to be a bigger picture, one with more cooperation between firms to develop tools, workflows, and common data sets that can help bring the whole industry forward. Our increased adoption of digital collaboration tools and new perspective on the role of technology in the AEC industry has led to lessons and practices that can be carried through to whatever new future awaits us. ▀

ALEXANDRA POLLOCK, AIA, is chief technology officer and principal with FXCollaborative. Connect with her on [LinkedIn](#).



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Focus for C-Suite & AEC Executives

\$1,795/attendee

REGISTER NOW

Zweig Group is ready to see you in-person again!

Recognizing the slow return of in-person events, Zweig Group is proud to announce a special concept for 2021, the **Elevate Leadership Summit** - a meticulously curated in-person event of limited capacity in Denver this Winter. This Summit will focus on the networking and learning pillars of our traditional Elevate AEC Conference. Attendees can expect an enriching thought leadership experience that focus on executive-level issues. This experience will be ideal for those who are ready to travel again and gather with fellow leaders of the AEC industry.

The **Elevate Leadership Summit** will be the industry's top conference of 2021 with new networking and learning opportunities for leaders across the country. Trust us, you will not want to miss this! Register now to guarantee your spot.



REGISTER NOW

Everything we do is in pursuit of elevating the AEC industry, bringing awareness of the incredible impact that engineers, architects, environmental professionals, surveyors, planners, landscape architects and related professional service providers have on the world. Empowering organizations with the resources they need to perform better, grow and add jobs, pay better wages and to expand their impact on the community, Zweig Group exists to advance the profession.

QUESTIONS?

For group discounts or any other inquiries, please contact events@zweiggroup.com, call 800.466.6275 or visit zweiggroup.com

PROFILE



Future focused: Carrie Hawley

CEO of HLB Lighting Design, Inc. (New York, NY), an internationally recognized design firm focused on architectural lighting for both interior and exterior environments.

By LIISA ANDREASSEN
Correspondent

Hawley first discovered her passion for lighting design while studying architecture at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio. She joined HLB as a designer, working on a wide range of projects. That was nearly 25 years ago. Today, she's actively involved in marketing and client development for the firm nationwide, and she thrives on market expansion and new opportunities.

"We are moving into the future at all times," Hawley says. "This instills trust. We work with clients to be part of the solution even if we did not create the problem. We stick by them."

A CONVERSATION WITH CARRIE HAWLEY.

The Zweig Letter: I see that you and Barbara Horton, the firm's founder, are co-CEOs. Tell me a little about how that came to be and the reason behind it. How are the responsibilities split?

Carrie Hawley: Well, by the time this issue is published,

Barbara will be retired. She plans to retire in February 2021. When we started the strategic plan transition several years ago, Barbara approached me about my interest in being the new CEO. I've been a principal since 2007 and it seemed like a natural next move. We decided a co-CEO transition made a lot of sense and we did that for one year prior. It was so helpful. Barbara has been an incredible cheerleader and mentor. I was given the chance to work with a coach too to truly understand the vision of the firm as well as working to establish best practices.

TZL: How has COVID-19 impacted your firm's policy on telecommuting/working remotely?

CH: We had a telecommuting policy, but it was more geared to senior staff. Prior to the pandemic, we had taken on IT and had cloud-based technology which was ready to go in December 2019. So, when the pandemic hit, we were ready. We no longer have a "policy," but it's now more of a guideline. It's up to the employees to decide how they best

work, thrive, and communicate. People want a sense of community too. So, we're rethinking what's critical together and what's not.

"We're always in a growth mindset. It fuels opportunities for others. Our growth is primarily organic and we have an active group in the firm that looks at geographic expansion."

TZL: How far into the future are you able to reliably predict your workload and cashflow?

CH: We have weekly projection meetings where the whole team provides projection forecasts. We recently invested in some technology to help with that. I'd say we can predict workload and cash flow very well for three months, good for six months, and decent for one year.

TZL: How much time do you spend working "in the business" rather than "on the business?"

CH: I work on billable work about 25 percent to 40 percent of the time. The rest is divided between firm oversight and business development. Everyone in the firm works on business development.

TZL: Trust is crucial. How do you earn the trust of your clients?

CH: Our company values earn their trust: artistry, curiosity, integrity, balance, and legacy. Also, we are moving into the future at all times. This instills trust. We work with clients to be part of the solution even if we did not create the problem. We stick by them. As a result, we have 80 percent to 90 percent client retention.

TZL: The last office HLB opened was Austin in 2018. Plans for future geographic expansion? All organic growth? Any acquisitions? If not, why not?

CH: We're always in a growth mindset. It fuels opportunities for others. Our growth is primarily organic and we have an active group in the firm that looks at geographic expansion. Currently, we have our eyes on several markets and are always open to new ideas. In 2018, we merged with Illumination Arts and that has proved to be a successful venture.

TZL: It is often said that people leave managers, not companies. What are you doing to ensure that your line leadership are great people managers?

CH: We've expanded the development and review process. The management team is now better equipped. We invest in resources and training. We also do firmwide emotional intelligence training and have a strong growth plan that sets people up for success. And, there's HLB University once a month that helps to develop leadership opportunities within the firm. So much of what we are about has to do with communication and transparency. It's a symbiotic relationship. We never brush stuff under the rug, but deal with it head on.

TZL: Is change management a topic regularly addressed by the leadership at your firm? If so, elaborate.

CH: Yes. Constantly. It's part of our strategic planning. We get buy-in and focus on change management from within rather than from the top down. It keeps us fresh, innovative, and moving forward. We have weekly check-ins at town halls and talk about anything that's changing and everyone is invited. We typically have about 90 percent attendance. We also do a lot of surveys in-house to instill buy-in. We recently started using a new survey system from Spain called TypeForm.

"So much of what we are about has to do with communication and transparency. It's a symbiotic relationship. We never brush stuff under the rug, but deal with it head on."

TZL: How often do you value your firm and what key metrics do you use in the process? Do you value using in-house staff or is it outsourced?

CH: We do an annual valuation in December. It's a third-party audit. All the usual metrics are used (i.e., revenue, cash, liabilities, and backlog).

TZL: HLB's website says that clients choose HLB for the "why" and "who." Can you give me a recent example that illustrates this?

CH: We actively survey our clients and the answers we most get about why they like

HLB

HEADQUARTERS: New York City

NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES: 90

YEAR FOUNDED: 1969

NUMBER OF OFFICE LOCATIONS: 7

and several remote teammates

SERVICES:

- Architectural lighting
- Daylighting
- Sustainable design
- Lighting controls
- Custom luminaires
- Product design
- Light art
- Digital media

OWNERSHIP: 72 percent women-owned

BENEFITS AND PERKS:

- Stay healthy benefits
- Generous PTO
- 401(k) plan
- Firmwide gatherings
- Flexible work options
- Educational opportunities
- Access to best tools and technology
- Half-day Fridays for three seasons
- Fridays off in summer

See FUTURE FOCUSED, page 8

BUSINESS NEWS

KEVIN BROWN JR. NAMED 2021 DELAWARE VALLEY YOUNG ENGINEER OF THE YEAR The Engineers' Club of Philadelphia announced that Kevin Brown Jr., PE, a transportation construction manager at **Urban Engineers**, has been selected as the 2021 Delaware Valley Young Engineer of the Year.

The annual award recognizes an outstanding engineer who is age 35 or under, has demonstrated leadership capabilities, and has made a recognized contribution to the engineering profession within the Greater Philadelphia region. Beyond the field of engineering, the recipient must also have contributed to and participated in charitable, civic, and technical affairs. In February, Brown was honored during Delaware Valley Engineers Week, which is part of a national engineering observance.

"Kevin is an outstanding candidate to represent the Delaware Valley's extraordinary group of young engineers," said Bob Wright, chair of the Delaware Valley Engineers Week Committee. "He demonstrates his passion for engineering in his work with Urban Engineers, but especially in his dedication to mentoring and educating the upcoming generation of engineers through his volunteerism with the ACE Mentor Program."

Brown started his career at Urban Engineers 12 years ago as a transportation construction inspector in the transportation division. In his current role as transportation construction manager, Brown leads many projects working closely with contractors in the field and mentoring the inspection team. He recently earned a lead role in one of Urban's major projects, managing and overseeing

all aspects of the I-76 Viaduct Rehabilitation project.

To supplement his work experience, Brown is involved in professional organizations within the industry, such as the American Society of Civil Engineers, the Construction Management Association of America, the National Society of Black Engineers, and the American Society of Highway Engineers. Brown also serves on the ACE Mentor Program's advisory council in Philadelphia, an organization he participated in as a student in high school. This national program aims to excite and enlighten high school students in the fields of architecture, construction, and engineering by connecting local professionals with students in team settings.

"Volunteering is important because if it wasn't for my experience with ACE, I don't think I would be receiving this honor," said Brown. "As a mentor, especially with the diverse groups of students we work with, I can connect with them on a level that other mentors can't. We experienced the same things, we look the same, and we talk the same. I believe by sharing my story as a young Black man in engineering, I can open their eyes to careers they may not have known were available or feel might not be attainable for someone who looks like them."

Having been recognized as the Delaware Valley Young Engineer of the Year, Brown said, "I know many people who have earned this recognition before me, and they have set the bar high. To see all of the great things previous Delaware Valley Young Engineers of the Year recipients have accomplished and to be a part of this elite group is an honor. I'm

excited to use this platform to help and mentor others."

A Philadelphia native, Brown grew up and currently resides in the Overbrook section of West Philadelphia. He earned a bachelor's degree in civil engineering and master's degree in civil engineering with a focus in structural engineering from Widener University.

A part of National Engineers Week, Delaware Valley Engineers Week has been held since 1953 and honors the approximately 100,000 engineers locally and 1.6 million engineers nationally who work to protect our health and safety, restore and defend the environment, build factories, run and contribute to our economic future and more. Engineers Week informs the public on the value of engineers, celebrates engineering marvels, technology and innovation, and works to inspire youth to consider careers in engineering. The Delaware Valley Engineers Week Committee, a committee of the Engineers' Club of Philadelphia, handles the planning, awards, events, and other aspects of Delaware Valley Engineers Week.

Formed in 1877, The Engineers' Club of Philadelphia provides a means for engineers to network and share information. The Club's vision is to unify engineers and related professionals in the Greater Philadelphia region. It's dedicated to relationship building and networking among technical professionals, communication and collaboration among engineers, raising the awareness of engineering in our society, and the professional development of its members. The Club has been organizing the celebration of Delaware Valley Engineers Week since 2008.

FUTURE FOCUSED, from page 7

to work with us has to do with thought leadership and being a good partner. Our clients don't just view us as a design facilitator. We also have a diverse market sector capability and varied design studios. Our advanced skill set also allows us to embrace controls, not just the design. We address wellness and sustainability simultaneously.

"You have to ensure that people recognize their potential and help them to see their future. The greatest pitfall is lack of communication. You have to keep asking the question, 'Where do you see yourself in five years?'"

TZL: Ownership transition can be tricky, to say the least. What's the key to ensuring a smooth passing of the baton? What's the biggest pitfall to avoid?

CH: We began that a long time ago. We have this down to

a science. You have to ensure that people recognize their potential and help them to see their future. The greatest pitfall is lack of communication. You have to keep asking the question, "Where do you see yourself in five years?" It's also important to hire a good lawyer.

TZL: What unique or innovative pricing strategies have you developed, or are you developing, to combat the commoditization of engineering services?

CH: We have a service fee option strategy to help clients visualize what they need. We provide a three-tier presentation communication tool. The tiers are: limited, optimal, and enhanced. We find that this system puts the client in control. Instead of sending out 7-10 page legal documents that they have to go through, this 1-2 page, bulleted document is easy to digest and understand. It's graphically pleasing and has transformed how we communicate value.

TZL: In one word or phrase, what do you describe as your number one job responsibility as CEO?

CH: Drive trust, sense of purpose, and growth mindset. Future focus. ▀



The need for speed

A lack of speed is a big problem for too many A/E firms. You all really need to pick up the pace!



**Mark
Zweig**

When I was young, I had a need for speed. I was always looking to go faster. At the age of 12, I learned I could reach down and pull the governor on my three-horsepower Sears mini bike, and it would go a whole lot faster. I put on a set of straight pipes and rejettied the carburetors on my Honda CB160 when I was 13, and it went faster. I tried (and ultimately failed) to put a 283 Chevy V8 in my first car, a 1950 Ford, at age 16 so it would go faster.

It just went on from there, as I owned many popular pony and muscle cars in my youth. I was always cranking up distributors to advance the timing, opening up exhausts, changing carburetors and pulling off restrictive air cleaners to make my cars go faster. After finishing grad school, I traded my mobile home for a CBX Honda, a six-cylinder bike with 105 horsepower. As I got older, I got into V8-powered BMWs and Porsche 911 coupes. I owned a heavily-modified 1972 Kawasaki H2 750 two-stroke (known as a “widow maker”) for years. We put hopped up V8s in everything, from my restored 1930 Model A Ford, to my 1935 Ford pickup, and even into my 1951 Nash Statesman, increasing its horsepower from 85 to 434. One of my last company cars at Zweig Group was a 2016 Cadillac CTS-V that had 640 supercharged horsepower and would do a quarter

mile in the high 11s. My current daily driver is a 22-year-old 6.75 liter V8 turbocharged Rolls Royce Silver Spur.

We discovered that many of our architecture and engineering clients liked speed, too. Eventually, Zweig Group (then known as Zweig White) started having CEO retreats at racing schools. We did formula cars and Dodge Vipers at Skip Barber, Winston Cup cars with Richard Petty, and motorcycle road racing with Freddie Spencer. More recently, we did a supercar driving experience on a race track.

But we aren’t here to talk about cars and motorcycles. We are instead here to talk about how to make A/E firms more successful. And I

See MARK ZWEIG, page 10



ON THE MOVE

RJN ANNOUNCES NEW PARTNERS At RJN, when individuals demonstrate acute business acumen and an aptitude for leadership, our firm takes notice. With this in mind, we are pleased to announce that Randall Brodner, PE, and Todd Leistner have been named RJN principals.

In their current roles Randy and Todd – Tulsa branch manager and CFO, respectively – have had a tremendous impact on our firm and the value we strive to bring to our clients. Under their leadership their respective offices have made great strides to achieve smart growth in RJN’s business portfolio and strong financials. Being a principal carries with it several

responsibilities, the primary ones being to promote RJN’s employee ownership culture, mature client relationships, and further the company’s vision. Partners are key representatives of RJN’s interest and act as ambassadors internally and externally for the company.

Executive Vice President Paul Costa said that their joining the principals will add depth of expertise and diversification to RJN’s leadership team.

“Both Randy and Todd bring experience and knowledge in their areas of expertise,” he said. “They have proven themselves to be strategic thinkers and their addition to the

principal group will serve RJN well for years to come.”

Established in 1975, RJN Group Inc. is an employee-owned, professional engineering and specialty field services firm with a focus on water, wastewater, and stormwater systems.

RJN’s mission is, with an unwavering commitment to the water environment, to continue lead with innovation and ingenuity, to help utility owners meet their level of service goals.

RJN Group, Inc. has been named a Zweig Group Best Firms to Work For, a recognition that is a culmination of effort by all employee-owners.

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can tell you that a lack of speed is a big problem in the A/E firms I have worked for and with over the years. You all really need to pick up the pace!

What do I mean by that? Here are my thoughts:

- **A lack of speed to fill jobs.** Why are A/E firms so slow to fill their job openings? Not filling key roles quickly can impact client service, revenue, and profitability, and contribute to staff burnout. Time to fill jobs needs to be tracked and reported, and reduced as much as possible to avoid these kinds of problems.
- **A lack of speed in billing.** As hard as it is to believe, there are still small firms out there that don’t bill their clients throughout the month. Instead they wait until the end of the month to send clients bills, which is crazy. They also commonly spend days and sometimes weeks reviewing draft bills before sending them, which also hurts their cash flow. Billing has to be sped up!

“Being fast to respond is always appreciated by people inside and outside of the company. It shows the other people you think they are important. Speed it up and stop making excuses.”

- **A lack of speed in collecting money that’s owed.** Why so many cash-strapped A/E firms act as if their clients can pay whenever they feel like it is beyond me. Ninety days is **NOT** normal nor is it OK. Any firm that tolerates this kind of nonsense will need so much more working capital than those that don’t, and it’s commonly the reason companies in our business need huge accounts receivable (AR) lines of credit because they don’t do a good job collecting money owed to them just so they can stay in business. It’s crazy!
- **A lack of speed to perform the month-end closing.** Why A/E firms take weeks or months to close out a month is beyond me. It should be done quickly and within days of the period ending so you can tell whether or not you made any money. Stop making excuses and speed it up!
- **A lack of speed in making bonus payments.** Most firms wait until year-end to pay out any bonus money to their

owners and staff. That is crazy! It is widely accepted that paying bonuses sooner to connect behaviors to results is much better. I prefer monthly bonus payments. My fallback, if I can’t get a firm to do that, is quarterly bonus payments. Paying out bonuses annually is too slow!

- **A lack of speed in returning phone calls and emails.** This is number one in my book, and the easiest thing anyone in this business can do. Being fast to respond is always appreciated by people inside and outside of the company. It shows the other people you think they are important. Speed it up and stop making excuses.
- **A lack of speed in dealing with problems in the field.** This is almost always a common complaint about A/E firms from clients and contractors. Time is money. And the sooner you deal with problems, the less likely they will mushroom out of control. Pick up the pace and improve your firm’s performance.
- **A lack of speed to perform cost cutting.** A/E firms are notoriously bad about cost-cutting. Billings can be down and backlogs low, and the pipeline can be too thin, and yet we still wait too long to cut costs. As a result, we dig huge financial holes that may take years to get out of all because we do not act when it is clear that we need to. I have seen A/E firms put out of business because of their lack of speed in decision making.
- **A lack of speed in dealing with employee performance problems.** You cannot wait until annual review time to confront performance and attitude problems with employees, yet procrastination and wishful thinking on the part of A/E firm managers rule the day in so many firms. The sooner you deal with performance problems in your employees, the better. One bad apple can spoil the whole bunch, so pick up the pace!
- **A lack of speed in communicating everything.** Whether it is the open-book management report that goes out to all, or getting word out after a critical project meeting about changes that will affect everyone else on the design team who wasn’t at the meeting, or providing notifications about policy or benefit changes, time is your enemy! Speed up!

I could go on here, but I, too, have to speed this up. It’s time to take a quick shower and get on with my day! ■

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Why?

Channel your inner toddler and question everything about your marketing plan to uncover what still does or doesn't work for you, your firm, and your goals.



Jane
Lawler
Smith

An anyone with children, grandchildren, nieces, nephews, or any precocious youngsters in their lives will know exactly what I am talking about. The relentless stream of why questioning is a phase that most children go through.

Today, I suggest you revisit those days by channeling your inner toddler and aim that relentless stream of questioning on your own marketing plan, activities, and budget.

Question everything and whether or not it still works for you, your firm, your goals, and your brand.

BUT WHY? The overriding reason is, if an activity does not promote you, your firm, your goals, and your brand, it is probably time to stop doing it. So often, especially when firms that have some longevity behind them, we unconsciously do things because that's the way we do things here.

However, that justification is now a moot point. In 2021, it is time to completely leap over that mindset and realize that here is a very different place than it used to be. The global pandemic that

began in 2020 knocked us all out of the realm of business-as-usual. And the real kicker is, business-as-usual may never return. Ever.

Which one could interpret as a great thing for marketing professionals. The pandemic is a disrupter of the grandest scale. This makes marketing and sharing your precise story more important now than ever.

So we are faced with an opportunity to make things more thoughtful, meaningful, and relevant. And we can succeed by simply asking why.

Let's look at a basic example first, something that is a ubiquitous part of most AEC marketing: business cards.

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ON THE MOVE

RVE ADDS NEW PRINCIPAL TO EXECUTIVE TEAM
Remington & Vernick Engineers welcomes Stephanie Cuthbert, PE, CME to the firm's executive leadership. Cuthbert joined RVE in 1993 and was named a senior associate of the firm in 2016. She currently is the department head of RVE's water and wastewater department.

Cuthbert has led her team in acquiring in excess of \$85 million in funding for clients to assist in the development of safe, reliable, and sustainable water and sanitary systems.

She graduated from Drexel University and has more than 27 years of experience in the water and wastewater industry. Cuthbert is a licensed professional engineer and certified municipal engineer in New Jersey. Her areas of expertise include the evaluation of water and sewer infrastructure and the design and permitting of utility system improvements.

"I am pleased both professionally and personally to welcome Stephanie as a principal. I have watched her grow technically and have seen her become a respected leader

during her remarkable career at RVE," said Edward Vernick. "Stephanie's combination of passion for her work and commitment to her team is obvious to her clients and all who work with her. I look forward to seeing her take on the challenges of this new level of leadership."

RVE, a full-service engineering firm, provides design, planning, and construction management and inspection services. Founded in 1901, the firm has grown to more than 350 employees in offices located throughout New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware and Maryland.

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WHY DO WE DISTRIBUTE BUSINESS CARDS? This is a simple question with a long history and perhaps a complex and multi-faceted answer behind it.

The origins of business cards can be traced to the 17th century. Originally employed in social contexts with their own coded folding system (cards with a corner fold for people who actually stopped by in person, cards folded in half intended for the whole family), visiting cards were quickly adopted by the trades, and eventually morphed into the business cards we know today, with their own codes.

"Take the time to question why, explore your reasoning to the core of the issue, and ensure that your marketing is intentional, as opposed to doing things a certain way just because last year's marketing plan says to."

According to [an article titled "A History of Business Cards" by Designer Daily](#), "Time has eroded much of the etiquette regarding business cards, however rules do persist. Cards should not be handed out by the left hand, should never be written on and should always be translated to the language of the specific country they are being handed out in on the rear of the card. They should never be carried loose. They should always be presented in the best condition."

Obviously, by surviving from the 17th century to 2021, business cards have proven they have staying power. Yet today, in 2021, ask the question: why does your firm distribute business cards?

There are likely as many reasons to continue with traditional printed cards as there are to move away from them. If you stick with the cards, why are you choosing to do so? Why do your clients or prospective clients accept them? Why do you make space on the exhibit hall display for them? Why do new employees get them? Why do you reorder them for seasoned staff? Why do you use printed cards? Why do you use digital cards? Why do you use both?

The answers to these queries may be supportive of your actions ... or not. But answering the why will most likely drive your future steps in one divergent direction or another and point you to some important realizations.

With toddlers, we are often drawn to the point of exasperation because, let's face it, without Google, most of us don't know why the sky is blue.

However, in marketing, in business, in AEC, we need to be able to rise to the challenge, pursue the line of questioning, and deliver robust answers to the question, why?

THE HOW-TO OF WHY? Answering the why of your marketing activities will help determine what activities should remain, what may go away temporarily, and what should go away for good.

In the world of why, advocates postulate anywhere from four to nine rounds of why to get to the core answer. (If Googling the topic, you may uncover the "5 Whys" used by Toyota.) Test some rounds out and see what works for you. Just keep in mind that we are driving for purpose in your marketing, not the purpose of the universe.

In addition to asking why, an equally key component is listening. With a toddler, what can be just as frustrating as the questioning is that it often seems like they are not listening to the answer before asking the next why?

Don't do that to your team or to yourself.

In addition, a knee jerk answer or repetition of the party line is also not helpful. Yet, even if you get (or give, if conducting these exercises solo) the automatic, company-sponsored response, listen to the answer. Then keep asking why. At some point you will get to the core issue. Keep pushing until you get to the (sometimes amazing, light bulb moment!) answer.

STAY FOREVER YOUNG. Why do you attend conferences? Why do you print those brochures? Why do you sponsor that event? Why do you pay for that online listing? Why does your website look like that? Why do you give out swag? Why do you send holiday cards? Why did you choose this logo? These colors? This font? That tagline?

You may have very good reasons why you do all the things you do in AEC marketing. However, your efforts will be more effective if you take the time to question why, explore your reasoning to the core of the issue, and ensure that your marketing is intentional, as opposed to doing things a certain way just because last year's marketing plan says to. ▀

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