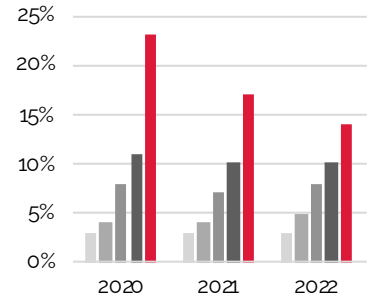


TRENDLINES

Bonuses for principals



- Entry level
- Project engineer
- Project manager
- Associate/department manager
- Principal

Zweig Group publishes yearly reports on salary trends in the AEC industry. In the *2023 Salary Report of AEC Firms*, it was identified that principals experienced a steep decline in bonuses. Median bonus as a percentage of base salary declined from 23 percent in 2020 to 14 percent in 2022.

[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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Employee experience matters

Taking steps to ensure your employees have the best experience possible can go a long way.



Kyle Ahern

The average person will spend around 100,000 hours of their lives at work. Let me say that again: Around 100,000 hours of the average person's life is spent at work. The employee experience matters! If you are going to ask someone to spend that kind of time with your firm, making it a good experience should be the least you are striving for. That said, no two employees want the exact same employee experience. So, how do we try to address something so complex? The answer is employee experience assessments.

Employee experience assessments are important because they provide insights into how employees feel about their work, work environment, and the overall company culture. The assessments can be used to identify areas for improvement in the workplace, and help organizations create a positive and supportive work environment for their employees. By regularly conducting employee experience assessments, organizations can track changes in employee satisfaction over time, and make data-driven decisions to improve the employee experience. A positive employee experience leads to increased engagement, productivity, and employee retention, making it a critical aspect for the overall success of a company.

Using data to drive the employee experience involves collecting, analyzing, and acting on data related to the employee experience, such as through employee surveys or feedback mechanisms. This data helps organizations understand the current state of the employee experience, identify areas for improvement, and track progress over time. For example, data can be used to:

1. **Identify patterns and trends.** By analyzing data from employee surveys, organizations can identify common themes and areas for improvement across different departments or locations.
2. **Make data-driven decisions.** With data in hand, organizations can make informed decisions about what changes to make to improve the employee experience.
3. **Measure the impact of changes.** Data can be used to measure the impact of changes made to the employee experience and track progress over time.
4. **Prioritize initiatives.** Organizations can prioritize initiatives based on

See KYLE AHERN, page 2

BUSINESS NEWS

LIBESKIND STUDIO DESIGN EXPANDS WITH NEW DESIGN STUDIO LOCATION IN ROME, ITALY Internationally-recognized architect Lev Libeskind announced that his architecture firm, Libeskind Studio Design, is expanding with a new design studio in Rome, Italy. The firm also revealed plans to open additional offices in Los Angeles.

"We're growing quickly," said Lev Libeskind. "This new studio – with spectacular views of the center of Rome – will allow us to capture inspiration and use that spark to create novel forms and exciting architectural ideas."

Lev Libeskind and his studio were recently nominated for their collaboration with Hennessy and Studio Libeskind to revamp Richard Hennessy's famed bottle.

The studio has previously collaborated on projects as the CityLife Residences in Milan, Italy; the Life Electric sculpture in Como, Italy; the MO Modern Art Museum in Vilnius, Lithuania; and the Thiers Station in Nice, France. The company is currently focused on new designs, including House X in West Palm Beach, Florida; Diamond Residences in Dallas, Texas; Rainbow Road Residences in Phoenix, Arizona; and the El Corazon tower in Mexico City.

"Architecture should be an experience," said Director of Libeskind Studio Design, Zachary Cohen. "We're excited to bring together incredible people in new locations across the globe as we seek to deliver thoughtful, meaningful designs to enhance local communities."

KYLE AHERN, from page 1

the greatest impact they will have on the employee experience, as indicated by the data.

Using data to drive the employee experience is a proactive and evidence-based approach to improving the work environment and creating a positive workplace culture.

As part of Zweig Group's Best Firms To Work For Award, we ask firms to complete a corporate survey that ties into their overall firm score. In that survey we ask, "Does your firm share with all staff a working strategic business plan?" Seventy-five percent of firms responded that they did compared to 25 percent responding "no" or that it is only shared with some staff, but not all. Every strategic plan I have seen includes an employee assessment component, as it should. So, I am assuming that, of the 75 percent of firms that do share their plan, each of them also has an employee experience component. The voluntary turnover rate at firms that share their working strategic business plan with all of their employees is 6 percent lower than those that do not. Sharing the results and the plans that are formed from them is proven to be at the very least an important part of a firm's retention plan.

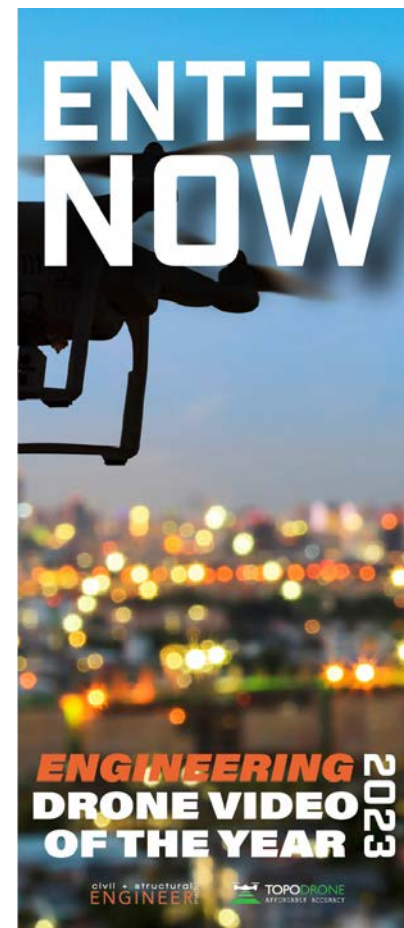
Employee experience is extremely important. If we are going to ask people to spend as much, if not more, time at work as with their families, we ought to do our best to make it worth it. There is no way to make it perfect for every employee – and we would kill ourselves trying – but making sure we are taking the steps to ensure our employees have the best experience possible sure can go a long way. The employee experience matters and so employee experience assessments matter!

Participating in Zweig Group's Best Firms To Work For Award is a great way to gain insight into what your people look for in their workplace experience. Entering the award program gives your firm access to powerful employee survey data and industry benchmarks. [Click here to learn more!](#) ➤

Kyle Ahern is an employee experience and data strategist at Zweig Group. Contact him at kahern@zweiggroup.com.



ZWEIG GROUP AWARDS Join the growing list of successful Zweig Group award winners. Zweig Group's awards program has recognized and celebrated AEC industry firms for more than 20 years. Wondering what kind of firm wins a Zweig Group award? See the prestigious list of previous winners in the Best Firms To Work For, Marketing Excellence Awards, and Hot Firm List, among others. 2023 enrollment is open. [Enter your firm today!](#)



THE ZWEIG LETTER

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What they don't teach in school

As much as school can and does teach you, there are some lessons that can only be learned "on the job."



**Reid
Poling, PE,
MS, LEED
AP BD+C**

Think back with me, if you will, to your graduation. High school or college, this milestone is rightly celebrated as a key lifetime achievement. For me, in true University of Kansas tradition, I walked through the Campanile down to Memorial Stadium to hear speeches and wishes of good luck for the future. Days before, I walked across the stage in the famous Allen Fieldhouse in a separate School of Engineering ceremony with my classmates. Possibilities abound, graduates set off to begin their new careers after what feels like a lifetime of preparation, studying, and exams. However, as much as school can and does teach you, there are some lessons that are just plain difficult to teach and are learned only "on the job."

Let me take you through some of the lessons I have learned in the past five years since my own graduation. If you are a relatively recent graduate, or perhaps still a student, these words of advice may help prepare you further for life outside of the classroom. And if you have been in the industry a while, this may serve as a reminder of the struggles encountered by a new graduate hire and offer both perspective and guidance.

- **Soft skills.** "Soft skills" were one of my biggest hurdles as a new graduate entering the

workforce. These skills include interacting with people, socially and professionally, which I, along with many other engineers, do not consider to be a strong suit. Certainly, some educational experiences help shape a person's ability to interact with others in diverse ways. Group projects, part-time jobs, and social clubs/groups provide the opportunity to interact with people, all of which feels like child's play compared to

See REID POLING, page 4



REID POLING, from page 3

working in the real world as part of a team to produce a complex construction project.

Occasionally, you will be required to work with clients or co-workers who you do not enjoy or even get along with. Diplomatically and pleasantly maneuvering through the ever-changing scope, schedule, and budgetary requests, concerns, and issues of difficult team members takes finesse and experience. While a portion of that experience comes from workplace mentorship, often much of it is learned through mistakes and personal conflict, which is very difficult to authentically duplicate in the classroom. It is challenging for an analytical, left-brained engineer to comprehend and effectively adjust to not receiving an individual grade at the completion of the assignment in addition to the reality that the team will inevitably succeed or fail as a single unit. Furthermore, finger-pointing, or personal attacks are often seen more as a flaw of the accuser than that of the individual who caused the problem. Many professionals struggle with this concept throughout their entire career, though it is an important skill to understand when aiming to succeed as part of a bigger team. In addition, avoiding negative behaviors and fostering rapport amongst the team both internally and externally produces far better outcomes not only for the project and its stakeholders, but also builds stronger relationships between co-workers, clients, and industry peers.

“Just as we did as students, we must continue to push ourselves outside of our comfort zone to learn new skills throughout our careers to remain leaders in our industry.”

- **Leadership.** Another soft skill which is difficult to teach is leadership, not to be confused with management. While the basic skills of a manager may be taught including resource management and scheduling, first-hand experience is crucial to developing leadership skills. Sure, there are many classes, books, and even videos that capitalize on effective leadership tips and tricks, all of which can certainly prove beneficial. However, the argument can be made that you need to “walk the walk” in order to learn how to be an effective leader. Leadership is judged by actions, not by intentions. Are your actions respectable by your peers (or your team)? Do you point out the mistakes of others, or do you help them identify how to better avoid repeating those mistakes with constructive feedback? Do you leave others feeling like they have benefited from an interaction with you, or that they are worse for it?

Just as our projects are all unique and different, it is nearly impossible to have a “one-size-fits-all” approach to leadership and management. As a manager delegating further responsibilities to a younger colleague, it is imperative to consider the number of hours they are

budgeted for each job, and even their experience in managing projects. Be open to providing support as a mentor, and commit to providing feedback, both good and bad, with an understanding that effective leadership skills take time to develop. Being relatively fresh out of school generally translates into a willingness to learn and take instruction from others, a unique opportunity for a company to help shape and develop their employees. Perspective and empathy for people in varying stages of their career can work wonders to create a better working environment and culture for everyone.

“If you are a relatively recent graduate, these words of advice may help prepare you further for life outside of the classroom. And if you have been in the industry a while, this may serve as a reminder of the struggles encountered by a new graduate hire and offer both perspective and guidance.”

- **Personal management.** Management and leadership skills also apply to how you manage and lead yourself. Keeping track of constantly changing deadlines, a continuous flow of emails, and managing priorities in general are skills that are highly personal and must be learned through experience. An organizational system that works for one person may end up being a waste of time for another. It is up to the individual to determine the method that works best. Theoretically, this is something you may learn in school. Managing multiple classes, jobs, and clubs/athletics all play their part. However, the AEC industry is not as straightforward as school schedules can be. Classes have defined goals, targets, and a syllabus of what to expect in a very set and structured timeframe. It would be so simple if all design projects could exist in the initially defined schedules, but things change, conflicts occur, and delays arise. Projects overlap and designs are modified. Personal management tools learned in school must adapt to the continuously changing landscape of professional life.

Whether or not my struggles with learning soft skills in the workforce resonate with you, there are certainly some things you have learned the “hard way.” Perhaps you excel socially, but tend to struggle with technical tasks. Each day as a professional, there are things that we all do which we never learned in school. Some days the easiest things you do in your career are what you struggled learning in school. For me, the days when I run photometric calculations are a return to the familiar and a welcome reprieve from a hectic work schedule. Nonetheless, just as we did as students, we must continue to push ourselves outside of our comfort zone to learn new skills throughout our careers to remain leaders in our industry. ▀

Reid Poling, PE, MS, LEED AP BD+C is an electrical design engineer at PK Electrical.

PROJECT MANAGEMENT FOR AEC PROFESSIONALS

VIRTUAL COURSE - MAY 2023

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			

This course is structured into four 1.5-hour modules on Tuesdays, from 11:00 AM CT - 12:30 PM

Module 1: May 9
Setting the Project up for Success with Project Discovery

Module 2: May 16
Developing a Goal-Directed, Logic-Based Workplan

Module 3: May 23
Monitoring Progress with the Project Scorecard

Module 4: May 30
Problem Solving

As project complexity and speed continue to grow, so does the need for simple frameworks that help project managers produce consistent results for their firms and their clients. The ideal project process is uncomplicated, clear, and repeatable, while bringing laser-like focus to those elements that have the greatest influence on how you and your clients define success.

This course will help take the guesswork out of leading a project team. It will equip project leaders with practical, science-backed skills so they can empower their teams, optimize their project process, and surpass project goals.

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- + Access to the exclusive, facilitated online community for ZG Learning alumni
- + 6 LU/6 PDH/.6 CEU - Zweig Group is a registered continuing education provider with the American Institute of Architects, and SHRM.

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PROFILE



Leading by example: Carlo Taddei

Principal at JQ (Dallas, TX), a team of professionals providing structural and civil engineering, geospatial, and facility performance services within a diverse group of markets.

By LISA ANDREASSEN
Correspondent

Taddei leads the JQ office in Fort Worth, Texas. He's been with the company for nearly 20 years and is responsible for client interaction, consulting, and project review from inception through construction. Aside from day-to-day office leadership, Taddei focuses on consulting for building projects and contributes structural design and analytical experience. He enjoys diving in to discover specific client interests and has developed a reputation for being able to successfully manage projects of any size.

"I feel that it's important to approach leadership with empathy and to treat others the way I want to be treated," Taddei says. "As a proud Aggie, leading by example is a principle that has stuck with me throughout my career and it's something that I strive to instill in others."

A CONVERSATION WITH CARLO TADDEI.

The Zweig Letter: Five years ago, you were chosen as a "40 under 40" by the *Fort Worth Business Press*. To what do you feel you most owe that honor?

Carlo Taddei: Having a strong, tireless work ethic and passion for engineering and architecture. I would attribute my work ethic to my mom. At the age of 45, and with three kids at home, she went back to school to earn her master's degree. She showed me that anything was possible with sacrifice and hard work. In 2014, I took over as office lead in Fort Worth and am proud of the community connections and relationships I've built. Having a supportive and committed team around me was the key to our collaborative success.

TZL: JQ's website states, "We're not your usual engineering firm." What gets you most excited about JQ? What really sets you apart?

CT: Not doing the same thing daily. While I lead our higher education market, statewide, our firm is not single-market focused. Our projects are diversified between public and private which helps in the business sense during times of economic uncertainty, and we are also diversified within market sectors. This is especially helpful for engineers beginning their careers as they may simultaneously be

working on a K-12 school, fire station, hotel, and manufacturing warehouse.

TZL: Have you had a particular mentor who has guided you – in school, in your career, or in general? Who were they and how did they help?

CT: The AEC industry is large, but small at the same time. So, the “person” becomes the group of co-workers you rely on and bounce ideas off of on a daily basis. They’re also previous co-workers who I grew up with in the industry and the colleagues at competing firms who I’m friendly with and even rely on for advice. It’s the architects, consultants, and GCs who I’ve worked with on dozens of projects over the years. They all fit in as pieces to form the puzzle that is a career and each has a part in helping it grow.

TZL: What next big accomplishment do you have your sights set on?

CT: Professionally, an immediate accomplishment relates to the dozens of higher education projects our team is working on at campuses across the state from the capital construction assistance project funding. Many of these projects are focused on STEM and health sciences and will be game changers for the universities, the students, and our future workforce. Having a part in delivering these projects and making a difference in the programs for decades to come is important to me. And, helping to build and expand a firm with engineers, technicians, surveyors, marketing, and administrative staff within it who feel supported, challenged, and fulfilled at work is a day-to-day goal.

“One of our cultural tenets is ‘chart your course’ and we encourage our employees to explore different career paths and provide opportunities to try out different things. We want them to make their careers what they want them to be.”

TZL: What skills are required to run a successful practice? What do you wish you knew starting out that you know now?

CT: Running an engineering firm requires much more than engineering skills. You need to know about billing, taxes, marketing, client relations, human resources, payroll – the list goes on and on. I’m learning daily

and still discover things I don’t know. I wish more engineering programs stressed the importance of business in the engineering profession and provided curriculum to enhance business acumen. It’s such a relationship business and finding ways to support your clients both in practice and on a personal level is an important skill to have.

(Oh, and you’ll spend a lot of time in the car and on conference calls.)

“I wish more engineering programs stressed the importance of business in the engineering profession and provided curriculum to enhance business acumen. It’s such a relationship business.”

TZL: Since you’ve been a principal with JQ – what’s been a top challenge and how have you worked to resolve it?

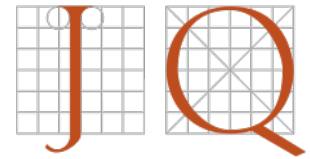
CT: Managing expectations and making sure the team’s workload is balanced. In an industry where deadlines constantly change, it’s challenging to avoid the overlap of deliverables, but trying to make sure our staff are not overloaded consistently is key. Proactive hiring is one way to resolve it, but hiring has been another challenge the past few years. Tactics we have taken to resolve that have included hiring an internal recruiter and increasing our internal recruiting bonus.

TZL: What type of leader do you consider yourself to be?

CT: I like to think that people see me as a constructive teacher and strategic thinker who possesses solid problem-solving skills. I would categorize myself as a servant leader. I feel that it’s important to approach leadership with empathy and to treat others the way I want to be treated. As a proud Aggie, leading by example is a principle that has stuck with me throughout my career and it’s something that I strive to instill in others.

TZL: What advice do you have for people who are interested in entering the AEC industry today?

CT: An important part of your career – whether you become an engineer, architect, technician, or contractor – is being able to explain your ideas and designs to others. You will spend



HEADQUARTERS:

Dallas, TX

NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES:

103

YEAR FOUNDED: 1984

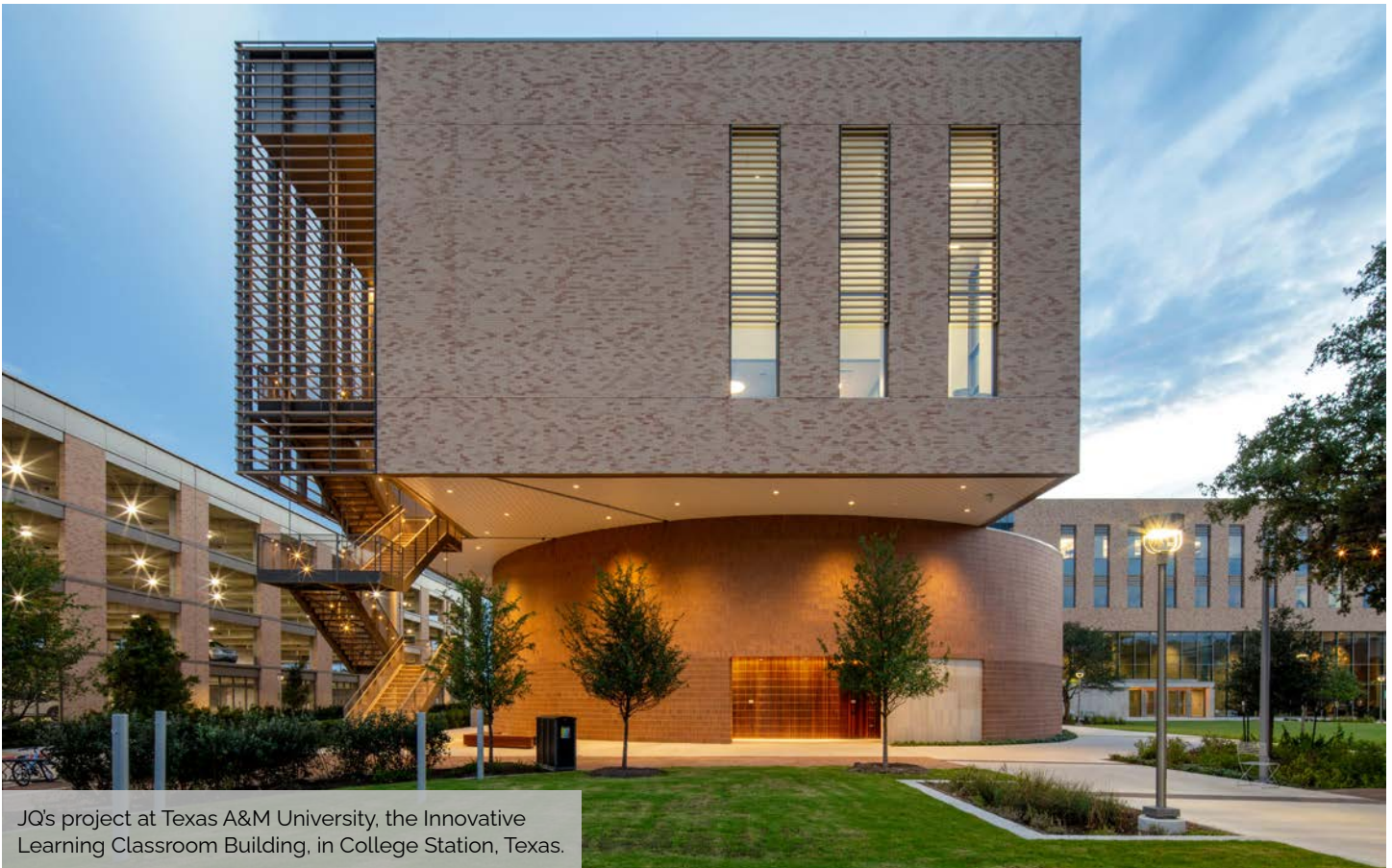
OFFICE LOCATIONS:

- Dallas, TX
- Fort Worth, TX
- Austin, TX
- Houston, TX
- San Antonio, TX

MARKETS: Aviation, commercial, cultural, distribution and manufacturing, evaluation and forensics, government, healthcare, higher education, hospitality, energy and power, infrastructure, K-12, living, parking structures, science and technology, sports and recreation

SERVICES: Structural engineering, civil engineering, geospatial, facilities performance

See LEADING BY EXAMPLE, page 8



JQ's project at Texas A&M University, the Innovative Learning Classroom Building, in College Station, Texas.

LEADING BY EXAMPLE, from page 7

your days writing emails, speaking to clients at meetings or jobsites, and eventually even writing proposals. Seek out electives in communication and/or writing. If you want to own a firm one day, you could take business classes. You will learn technical skills on the job and those "soft skills" are key to your career and life. Learn to break out of the norm and be comfortable with being uncomfortable in order to open yourself up to new opportunities and experiences. Also, find as many mentors as you can across different fields and with diverse backgrounds.

TZL: What benefits does your firm offer that your people get most excited about?

CT: The ones that people seem to comment on the most include our quarterly car details, option for pet insurance (as a non-pet owner, I guess this is important?), and monthly allowance toward a gym membership.

TZL: How are you balancing investment in the next generation – which is at an all-time high – with rewards for tenured staff? This has always been a challenge, but seems heightened as investments in development have increased.

CT: Internally, we've always celebrated employee anniversaries, but this year we implemented a more robust "milestone anniversary" acknowledgement (five years, 10 years, 15 years, 20 years, etc.) with an additional financial bonus on their anniversary. We understand how competitive the job market is currently and value our tenured staff for staying with JQ. This is in addition to the yearly points/gift (via our internal

employee engagement platform) that all staff receive on their anniversary.

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?

CT: Develop leaders early and provide opportunities for business training. It's important for people to understand things like cash flow, departmental budgets, valuation formulas, partnership agreements, and other key performance indicators that are important to running a successful business. It's never too early to start the process and to let people know that you are investing in them for the future. The biggest pitfall is starting the process too late.

TZL: A firm's longevity is valuable. What are you doing to encourage your staff to stick around?

CT: This is the number one challenge for AEC firms everywhere. I like to think we're very resourceful and tap into our various connections with peer firms, consultants, and clients to benchmark ourselves when it comes to compensation, benefits, culture, and employee engagement and experience. One of our cultural tenets is "chart your course" and we encourage our employees to explore different career paths and provide opportunities to try out different things. We want them to make their careers what they want them to be. We also provide opportunities for staff to take on more visible roles on projects early on in their career to get exposure to clients and other consultants. This helps our staff to feel more empowered and included. ▀



Maximize your trade show experience

Trade shows and conferences are a great opportunity for your firm, but exhibiting can be a waste of time if you don't approach it strategically.



**Julia
DeFrances**

As we look ahead to the rest of the year, it's more important than ever to think strategically about your marketing spending. Trade shows are excellent opportunities to network, develop business relationships, and get face-time with potential clients. Not all trade shows are created equal however, and some just aren't worth the investment. In order to maximize your trade show experience, you need to think strategically.

GO/NO-GO EVALUATIONS. Before a trade show even begins, it should be evaluated using a thorough go/no-go process, even if you've attended the show in the past. It's important to fight the urge to exhibit just because "we've always done so." Trade shows take a lot of time, money, and effort, so you need to prioritize the most impactful shows. The best trade shows offer a combination of exposure and brand awareness alongside an opportunity to build relationships with new and existing clients. Ask yourself some questions before you commit to exhibiting, such as:

- What goals do we hope to achieve by exhibiting?
- Are there key clients or decision makers in attendance?
- What brand or media exposure do we get beyond the physical exhibit booth?
- Is this a market or sector we are looking to grow in the next year?
- Is this a region or state where we have a presence? Is it a region or state we would like to enter?
- Will our competition be there?
- Are there less expensive and more effective ways to participate, such as networking as attendees, hosting a conference party, or presenting at a panel or session?

See JULIA DEFRANCES, page 10



TRANSACTIONS

BENNETT ENGINEERING SERVICES AND Y&C TRANSPORTATION CONSULTANTS HAVE MERGED

Bennett Engineering Services has merged practices with Y&C Transportation Consultants. The combined company will be called Bennett Engineering Services + Y&C Transportation (Bennett+Y&C). Bennett+Y&C takes pride in finding innovative and cost-effective engineering solutions to important infrastructure projects:

- Transportation
- Traffic engineering
- Water and wastewater
- Hydraulics and hydrology
- Site development

- Parks and recreation
- City and district engineering
- Funding

Together, Bennett+Y&C will maintain their Disadvantaged Business Enterprise and Small Business Enterprise certifications. The firms also complement each other in geography with Roseville, Sacramento, Fremont, and Milpitas office locations. Together the firm will provide services throughout California and Nevada.

Bennett+Y&C continues with its goal to serve its clients as trusted engineering advisors and offer dedicated, highly experienced project managers who focus on being accessible and responsive to client needs.

Zweig Group represented Bennett

Engineering Services in this transaction, and the deal team included Will Swearingen, a principal and director of ownership transition at Zweig Group, and Jamie Claire Kiser, managing principal at Zweig Group.

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.

JULIA DEFRANCES, from page 9

For a trade show to be worthwhile, more than one of the evaluation criteria should be met. A trade show in a key market isn't a good investment if it's for a region outside your firm's purview. A trade show with no decision makers in attendance isn't worthwhile just because your competitors plan to attend. At BL, we've even stopped exhibiting at trade shows that looked good on paper, because the exhibit floor was consistently hidden and none of the attendees ever stopped by any booths. You need to prioritize the shows that will be most impactful.

"Exhibiting at trade shows are an excellent opportunity to network, develop business relationships, and get face-time with potential clients. Not all trade shows are created equal however, and some just aren't worth the investment."

PRE-SHOW PLANNING. Once you've determined that a trade show is worthwhile, it's time to create an action plan to maximize that investment. If you go into a trade show without a plan, your staff won't know where to focus their energy, and it will be hard to know if your exhibit was even successful. What the action plan entails will differ depending on your goals, but there's some key things to look at regardless of what you want to achieve.

- Try to get a list of attendees so you can identify key contacts to prioritize connecting with during the conference. You don't want to miss out on a great potential client because you didn't know they were there.
- Train staff so they know how to be engaging and open

to conversation. Nothing kills a booth faster than staff who are closed off, distracted, or otherwise poor communicators. Trade shows should grow your brand, not hurt your reputation.

- Design the right booth. Exhibits should draw people in and keep them interested, so your staff can make a real connection. Raffles, new or exciting technology, or even a popular giveaway can be a great way to attract attention. At BL, we've had some great success just by hosting a game at our booths. It's a nice way for attendees to unwind between sessions, and our staff get a chance to talk to folks while they wait for their turn to play.
- Create some pre-show communications (e.g., social media posts, e-blasts, etc.) to further brand exposure and drum up excitement for your booth.

POST-SHOW ACTIVITIES. Once a trade show has ended, it's important to follow up with any potential clients, teaming partners, and leads. Don't let new contacts go to waste. It's also important to conduct a debrief with any staff who attended while the conference is still top of mind. Ask them about attendance, engagement, and specific outcomes. Was the exhibit hall well attended? Did clients stop by? Were goals met? If not, why? The answers collected during the debriefings will help determine if the trade show was indeed worth the investment. Additionally, it can give you an idea of where your own shortcomings are and where you can improve for the next show.

At the end of the day, trade shows and conferences are a great opportunity and exhibiting can be a great way to maximize those events. But exhibiting is a wasted opportunity if you don't approach it strategically. ▀

Julia DeFrances is a senior marketing coordinator at BL Companies, Inc. She can be reached at jdefrances@blcompanies.com.

FROM THE FOUNDER



People problems

As a business owner, people problems will probably be at the top of your “problems/opportunities” list.



**Mark
Zweig**

It's a cliché, but the fact is what really “keeps you awake at night” as a business owner is likely to be your people problems. You would think it would be about how to sell more of whatever you are selling, or get the cash you need to meet payroll, or something else. I won't say those kinds of crises don't come up – they most certainly can and do! But people problems will probably be at the top of your “problems/opportunities” list.

When I say “people problems,” I am referring to a wide range of issues. That includes everything from how you can change the compensation plan for your commissioned sales people to one that would better motivate them, to how you can promote one person but not another who will think they should be promoted too, to how you can get two people – both of them good people who are essential to your business – to get along.

None of these things are easy. No amount of formal education can prepare you for what you will encounter. There usually isn't a best approach to this stuff. Every situation is unique. That said, I do think some simple ideas can help you prepare better for these issues and help you deal with them:

1. **Pick your partners well.** Yes, partner problems happen often in our industry. They say most marriages break down over money issues. Well, think how much more likely that is if there is no love involved! My experience is that some people should never have gotten married as business partners. The best partners are people with completely different, non-overlapping strengths who have similar value systems. Follow your gut and make sure you protect yourself with the right legal form of organization and documentation of everything. It will make dealing with problems a lot easier.
2. **Hire the right people in the first place.** Character,

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BUSINESS NEWS

AECOM ACHIEVES NO. 1 RANKING BY FORTUNE MAGAZINE AS THE WORLD'S MOST ADMIRER COMPANY IN ITS INDUSTRY FOR A THIRD YEAR

AECOM, the world's trusted infrastructure consulting firm, announced today that it has achieved the No. 1 ranking on *Fortune* magazine's list of the World's Most Admired Companies in its industry for a third year, including ranking No. 1 in each of the list's nine criteria. This is the ninth consecutive year that the company has been recognized on the list.

"Sustaining our recognition as *Fortune's* World's Most Admired Company in our industry is only possible because of the strength of our employees – 50,000 talented professionals who are dedicated to our clients and our purpose of delivering a better world," said Troy Rudd, AECOM's chief executive officer. "The ingenuity, technical excellence and agility of our teams continue to differentiate AECOM as the leader in our industry and we remain committed to their success as we deliver value for our clients, the communities we serve and our shareholders."

AECOM achieved numerous milestones throughout fiscal 2022 as it progressed its Think and Act Globally strategy, including the following highlights:

- Extended track record of delivering

on all financial targets for the year, which is expanding the competitive advantage and long-term earnings power of the business.

- Invested in employees by enhancing its U.S. healthcare benefits to set a new standard in the industry and fostering a culture of greater work-life flexibility, increased global collaboration through Technical Practice Networks, and strengthened technical and professional development programs.
- Furthered the breadth and impact of its Digital AECOM capabilities with market-leading products like PlanEngage™, PlanSpend™ Fund Navigator and PipeInsights™, as well as service offerings that are creating new ways of solving the world's most complex infrastructure challenges.
- Advanced leadership in ESG through its Sustainable Legacies strategy, including launching its ESG Advisory practice to help clients address their ESG risks, becoming one of the first companies to set new and more rigorous net zero targets approved by the Science-Based Targets initiative, and implementing its global Social Value policy and new ESG training programs.

"Thanks to our people, our greatest asset, we are honored to be recognized by *Fortune* as the World's Most Admired Company in our industry for the third consecutive year," said Lara Poloni, AECOM's president. "As we maintain our focus on creating the best place to work, leading the digital transformation of our industry and making a positive impact in communities around the world, I am excited by our position to drive the growth of our business and deliver even more for our clients."

Fortune collaborated with Korn Ferry on this survey of corporate reputations and determined the best-regarded companies by asking executives, directors, and analysts to rate enterprises in their own industry on nine criteria, from investment value and quality of management and products to social responsibility and ability to attract talent.

The complete World's Most Admired Companies list and details on the methodology can be found on the *Fortune* website.

AECOM is the world's trusted infrastructure consulting firm, delivering professional services throughout the project lifecycle – from advisory, planning, design and engineering to program and construction management.

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intelligence, and work ethic should rule. You can't train people for those things. You may be able to train them to use certain software, or how to write better, but it will be very difficult to change someone's basic personality. So don't forget that when hiring.

3. **Don't do anything too quickly – but don't be too slow to react, either.** We used to like to say HR problems will resolve themselves if left alone long enough, but the truth is, you may not like the resolution! So deal with these issues expeditiously. The longer you wait, the more collateral damage in the form of morale problems in the firm are likely to occur.
4. **Investigate, investigate, investigate.** Always remember there are two sides to every story. All you need are some friends who are getting divorced to know that is true! The truth of where things break down in a relationship is usually somewhere between what each of the people involved in the situation will tell you. So do your due diligence when working to solve any of these people problems.

5. **Control your emotions.** Nothing good will come from you losing your temper. In fact, a lot of bad can come from that. So learn to count to 10 when someone says or does something bad or annoying. And stay calm! This, too, shall pass!

"Every situation is unique. That said, I do think some simple ideas can help you prepare better for these issues and help you deal with them."

6. **Realize this is an important part of your job!** You are a leader. You are a manager. So you have to do your job. Realize these people problems are like an infection. It can spread. So deal with what you have to deal with!

People problems keeping you awake at night? Resolve to deal with them. And if that fails, one Tylenol PM usually works pretty well for me! ➤

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