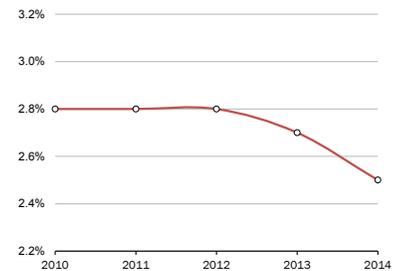


## Architecture: what future?

It doesn't look good right now, but in a changing world, architects will always be needed.

## TRENDLINES

### IT staffs down



IT staff as a percentage of total staff has been on a slight decline in the past two years, after remaining at a constant level in previous three years. According to ZweigWhite's 2014 Information Technology Survey, this number climbed to 2.8 percent in 2010, where it remained until 2013, when it dropped slightly to a median of 2.7 percent. This year, the report finds that IT staff as a percentage of total staff dropped again to a median of 2.5 percent.

— Margot Suydam, Survey Manager

Last chance to participate and save on the **2014 Fee & Billing Survey**. The **deadline is Friday, May 30**. Take the survey at: [www.zweigwhite.com/survey-participation.php](http://www.zweigwhite.com/survey-participation.php)



Mark Zweig

### EDITORIAL

There's a lot of discussion about the future of architecture. It's happening in the media, it's occurring in the halls of architecture schools, and it's taking place in architectural firms around the nation and the world. It's my turn to weigh in.

Architecture is under attack. Contractor-led design-build is eating into their market. Clients don't understand the value architects can bring to the building process, and lawyers find it just as easy to sue the architects as it is contractors, subcontractors and everyone else. There's a lot of risk for what ultimately may not be a lot of pay.

Meanwhile, architects aren't doing a very good job handling these threats. Contractors rule the design-build domain because they are less risk averse and have a much better handle than architects on what things actually cost to build. Some might say contractors are also more businesslike and less tolerant of non-performance from other team members. I would also say they are much quicker to compromise their design for cost (not always a good thing, ultimately, for the client, but definitely a good thing if you want a profitable project!).

Most architects have a very poor understanding of marketing and

See MARK ZWEIG, page 2

## FIRM INDEX

ArchitectsPlus .....	5
Computers & Structures, Inc. ....	11
CRB Consulting Engineers, Inc. ....	12
EHS Support, LLC .....	3
H2M architects + engineers .....	9
Traffic Planning and Design, Inc. ....	10
Wight & Company .....	9
Wilson & Company .....	3

Architecture is under attack. Contractor-led design-build is eating into their market. Clients don't understand the value architects can bring to the building process, and lawyers find it just as easy to sue.

## ALSO INSIDE

- GUEST SPEAKER: Stop trying to do everything. [Page 6](#)
- BRAND BUILDING: 'Select our firm: We are local!' [Page 7](#)
- RIGHT NOW: The evolution of the proposal. [Page 9](#)

WHAT'S WORKING



## Time to celebrate!

Pages 10 & 11

## When partners aren't sharing the load

Page 3

## A/E BUSINESS NEWS

**OLDIE BUT GOODIE:** A new research report titled *Older, Smaller, Better: Measuring How the Character of Buildings and Blocks Influences Urban Vitality*, by the National Trust for Historic Preservation, demonstrates how neighborhoods that protect and find new uses for older, smaller buildings are more economically sustainable, culturally vibrant, and opportunity-rich than those with only larger, newer buildings.

The report shows how neighborhoods with a mix of older and newer buildings outperform newer neighborhoods in terms of opportunities for small locally owned businesses and for local cultural outlets. Older neighborhoods are highly walkable, appeal to young professionals and retirees, and offer a wide array of arts and entertainment options.

“The National Trust’s research of neighborhoods with older, smaller buildings is the first comprehensive study of the relationship between cities’ historic buildings and prosperity,” said Stephanie Meeks, president of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. “The economic growth of communities is enhanced by preserving our historic neighborhoods. These areas attract more young, talented professionals, contain more businesses per commercial square foot and offer more creative jobs than areas with only larger, newer buildings.”

The report was produced by the Preservation Green Lab, an initiative of the National Trust for

### MARK ZWEIG, from page 1

brand-building, even though some have shown the incredible power a real brand brings in terms of more work and higher fees. You can’t blame clients for not wanting to educate their design professionals in the industry or business they operate in.

The resistance many architects still feel at their core to specialize is yet another problem. The Howard Roark model of a good architect who can design anything is taught in design schools around the globe. This hurts architects’ ability to be good functional designers and effective cost estimators. And the over-emphasis on design training in school has resulted in them having a big deficiency in terms of their overall construction knowledge. It’s not pretty.

Starting salaries for architects, after five years of education costing \$25-50K annually, remain around \$40K or so in most areas in the U.S., when new undergrads in business or engineering can make \$50-70K or more in some cases. This, too, is going to drive talent out of the field.

These are just some of the threats to the architectural profession.

But I still remain hopeful for the future of architects and architecture. The world is changing fast. We have huge population shifts occurring in many places in the world from the country to cities. We need better schools. Manufacturing is changing, requiring all new facilities.

Technological changes affect every place where people live and work. The healthcare area alone is a huge and growing market that requires good design. More people are in jail. More people are going to college. Our housing stock is inefficient. Public facilities are in need of investment. You get the idea.

There are also architects who are bringing in more construction knowledge to their firms, either through acquisitions or key hires – or both.

And there are some architects who are good marketers and business people. Look at the history and growth of companies such as **Gensler** or **DLR Group** and many others that keep growing and growing, good times and bad.

Finally, there’s hope for architectural education. Schools are trying to get students more relevant experience. They’re also doing more and better practice management education. I have even taught a course here at The Fay Jones School of Architecture called “Everything They Don’t (usually) Teach You in Architectural School.” And there are many other courses like this springing up at architectural schools all over.

The architectural profession isn’t doomed. But it is – and will be – going through some changes! ▲▲

MARK ZWEIG is the chairman and CEO of ZweigWhite. Contact him with questions or comments at [mzweig@zweigwhite.com](mailto:mzweig@zweigwhite.com).

Historic Preservation, with offices in Seattle, Denver and Los Angeles. The Preservation Green Lab works closely with local, state and national partners to develop innovative content, strategic partnerships, research and public policies that save places.

“For years, people have been pushing density above all else,” said Mike Powe, lead researcher for the Preservation Green Lab. “With our goal of supporting local businesses and neighborhoods, we now know from the insights in this report that how we build and what type of structures we maintain matters tremendously to the success of these communities.”

Key findings:

- Older, mixed-use neighborhoods are more walkable.
- Young people love old buildings.
- Nightlife is most vibrant on streets with a diverse range of building ages.
- Cultural outlets thrive in older, mixed-use neighborhoods.
- Older business districts offer greater opportunities for entrepreneurship, including women and minority-owned businesses.
- Older, smaller buildings support the local economy with more non-chain, locally owned businesses.
- Older business districts have more businesses per commercial square foot.



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## LEADERSHIP

# When partners aren't sharing the load

Having clearly defined objectives for each role is essential benchmark to measure performance and take necessary action.

By LIISA SULLIVAN  
Correspondent

Sharing the load sounds like a good way to approach most business ventures, but what happens when one partner is pulling less weight than the others? Does the answer depend on whether they are a large or small stakeholder? And, just how important is it to get to the root of the problem first?

**SITUATION DICTATES HANDLING.** Steven Watt, president and CEO, **Wilson & Company** (Albuquerque, NM), a 450-plus-person multi-disciplinary engineering, architecture, surveying, mapping, environmental, and planning firm, says that there are a variety of reasons to explain a decline in a shareholder's performance, some beyond their control (such as an economic downturn in a specific market).

"It's always a challenging situation to deal with and the reasons for the decline matter as to how it's handled," Watt says.

He says that (a hopefully) temporary downturn often can be addressed through a reduced (or eliminated) year-end bonus. However, more structural/permanent downturns call for more structural measures, and might include adjustments in base compensation, number of shares owned and a reduced position and title. More serious situations that cannot be resolved or corrected can end in termination (or resignation).

"The size of an owner's 'stake' in the company does matter, somewhat, but for other reasons," Watt says. "A shareholder's level of ownership is generally reflective of a long history of contribution to the firm's success. The greater the contribution, and the longer period over which the contribution was made, the greater the level of ownership. So when the level of contribution of a senior shareholder slips, we tend to be more patient of recovery efforts. In the end, however, fairness to all of our shareholders means that patience must have limits."

**A VIRTUAL COMPANY SAYS PREVENTION IS THE BEST MEDICINE.** At **EHS Support, LLC**, a 60-person environmental, health, and safety solutions specialist with no offices, Bethany Evans, business manager and director of HR, says that they



Steven Watt,  
President and  
CEO, Wilson  
& Company.

## GOOD TO KNOW

Less than half of principals (35 percent) report they are subject to a regular performance appraisal.

**Source:** 2014 Principals, Partners & Owners Survey: [www.zweigwhite.com/p-2193-principals-partners-owners-survey-2014](http://www.zweigwhite.com/p-2193-principals-partners-owners-survey-2014)



Bethany Evans,  
Business  
Manager and  
Director of HR,  
EHS Support,  
LLC.

take an "all-encompassing approach to performance challenges," relying on the values and operating principles that drive corporate culture.

"The approach that we use to deal with performance deficiency is consistent whether we are dealing with an executive, a member of our management team, or an entry-level employee during the first months of their employment," Evans says. "Our goal during all performance improvement processes is to target the areas where the employee is not meeting expectations and to create an action plan to effectively assist them in becoming a high-functioning and integral contributing member of the team."

"If one or more partners are not pulling their weight, a regular board meeting will give the other partners the opportunity to share their feedback, and allow the management team to work together to explore any necessary changes that may need to be made."

The firm works with the team member to uncover the root cause of the situation and to develop an approach for the employee to improve and grow on a personal level, circumventing the typical disciplinary method of handling performance challenges.

"Focusing on our values and operating principles, we believe that each of our employees comes to work every day with the best of intentions and shared goals of providing excellent service to our clients," Evans says.

EHS Support finds that when every employee operates within the culture and relies on the values and operating principles to guide their daily interactions, situations like these are easier to address.

"Everyone has improvement areas, that's a fact of life. We believe that it takes an open, honest, and direct approach with the ability to accept constructive feedback and intentions of remedying the situation for the improvement of the individual, to ensure a positive outcome," Evans says.

And, although EHS takes the same approach to performance shortfalls at any level to ensure fairness, it's also important to consider individual circumstances, personality, background, experience level, and career goals when designing improvement ini-

See PARTNERS, page 4

## IN BRIEF

**HUNGRY FOR CEMENT:** Although recent economic indicators point to a tempering of the U.S. economy, the Portland Cement Association is maintaining its forecast for steady growth in construction and cement consumption during the next five years. A recent PCA forecast indicates a 7.9 percent increase in cement consumption for 2014, almost double from the 4.5 increase in 2013. The industry expects to see double-digit growth in 2015 and 2016 with 10 percent growth both years.

"There is considerable evidence that the economy's growth path has softened during the past several months," said Edward Sullivan, PCA chief economist and group vice president. "But we believe that the underlying economic fundamentals are stronger than the data suggest."

Real GDP weakened considerably during the fourth quarter to 2.6 percent from 4.1 percent in the third quarter of 2013. Preliminary first quarter estimates growth at a meager 0.1 percent. Furthermore, consumer confidence has recorded setbacks, mortgage applications have recorded sustained weekly declines, the housing market has stalled, and real put-in-place construction activity has slowed.

The principal cause for the recent economic weakness, according to Sullivan, is the unusually adverse weather conditions across the U.S. during the fourth quarter of 2013 and first quarter of 2014.

"The weather conditions had an obvious impact on cement consumption – limiting construction and concrete use," Sullivan said.

## PARTNERS, from page 3

tiatives to specifically target the issues that the individual is experiencing so they can determine the best path to improvement for the employee and the company.

The key to the success of this approach is having a group of employees and a management team who are motivated, responsible, and accountable.

"Being 100 percent virtual, we need every team member to be responsible for their own actions and tasks and act in the best interest of the company," she says.

EHS does this by providing an atmosphere for employees to succeed and encourages autonomy, creativeness and opportunity for long-term career growth. This culture, which has to be built on trust, has resulted in relatively minor performance issues across the team.

"I believe the best way to tackle performance challenges is to prevent them from occurring," Evans says. "We do that by maintaining a focus on every individual as an integral part of the team and possess a deep consideration and appreciation for the future of every person in the company."

**THERE'S NO SECRET FORMULA.**

Mark Nicholls, managing director, Tectona Partnership, a business advisory firm, says that if you are concerned about a partner, how you approach the issue could determine how successful an outcome you reach.

"If one or more partners are not pulling their weight, a regular board meeting will give the other partners the opportunity to share their feedback, and allow the management team to work together to explore any necessary changes that may need to be made," he says. "Regular management meetings are critical to review not only business progress, but to evaluate each business partner's performance and behavior in line with the objectives of the business."

Nicholls says that having clearly defined objectives, aligned to each partner's role within the business is important, as it allows for objective conversations to be had when tackling the issue of underperformance. If everyone is clear, a much more constructive conversation can be had if the business objectives aren't being met.

"There's no secret formula which will turn an underperforming partner around," Nicholls says. "It requires an alignment of each partners' business goals, and ensuring that the right people, with the requisite skills, are doing the right job for the current requirements of the business." ▀▲

## CALENDAR

**PRINCIPALS ACADEMY:** The Principals Academy, a crash course in all aspects of managing a professional services firm, is coming to several cities.

The program is presented by a team of speakers – including ZweigWhite founder and CEO Mark Zweig – with extensive experience working with and for A/E firms.

They have a clear understanding of what it takes to survive, and even thrive, in any economy.

The two-day agenda covers six critical areas of business management from the unique perspectives of architecture, engineering and environmental consulting firms, and is presented in tutorial and case study workshop sessions.

The Principals Academy program also includes a case study workshop session that will provide an opportunity to practice implementing these management strategies in a supervised test-case scenario.

Upcoming events include June 12 and 13 in Pittsburgh, Pa., Oct. 16 and 17 in Los Angeles and Nov. 13 and 14 in Miami.

For more information or to register, call 800-466-6275 or log on to [www.zweigwhite.com/seminars/tpa](http://www.zweigwhite.com/seminars/tpa).

**BECOMING A BEST SELLER:** Could every person in your firm describe your services in a succinct and persuasive way that demonstrates what sets you apart from the competition? It's not enough to have the technical expertise to complete projects, you need seller-doers who can convey excitement and tailor the message for the audience.

That's why ZweigWhite developed a one-day program that will help anyone who could possibly be involved in selling and who wants to be more successful and increase their value to their employers – design and technical professionals as well as marketing and business development professionals, principals, managers, architects, engineers, planners, scientists, surveyors, designers; anyone who wants to know more about selling.

Becoming a Better Seller was specifically developed to help design and technical professionals become more comfortable dealing with clients and promoting the firm and your services.

Seminars will be led by Mark Zweig, ZweigWhite CEO and chairman, or Chad Clinehens, executive vice president, ZweigWhite.

Seminar dates scheduled for 2014 include June 26 in Chicago.

Group discounts are available for teams of four or more attendees from the same firm. Please call 800-466-6275 or log on to [www.zweigwhite.com/seminars/better\\_seller](http://www.zweigwhite.com/seminars/better_seller) for details.

## FEEDBACK

# Driving the business and vice-versa

A reader responds to a recent Mark Zweig editorial with his own list of grievances.

In his editorial, titled “How do you come across?” in the May 12 issue of **THE ZWEIG LETTER** (#1055), Mark Zweig wrote about the habits that will make people not like you. Rick Koehler, chief strategic officer at **ArchitectsPlus** (Cincinnati, OH), a 112-person architecture and engineering firm, had a list of behaviors to add:

Mark,

I read with some level of humor your article, “How do you come across?” in the May 12 issue.

For 13 years I was an amateur race car driver in the Porsche Club of America race car series and, concurrent with that, I also instructed drivers on how to handle their cars on the race track during Drivers Education weekends.

Those experiences lead me to believe that people drive their cars much as they live their lives. That is: Are they forward thinking, do they always know what is in their rearview mirror, do they know who they are seeking to overtake, do they know who is seeking to overtake them, is their car interior neat and clean or is it a mess? You get the idea.

**GETTING STARTED.** When the person gets in the car, do they take the time to get things set up properly? This includes adjusting the seating position relative to the pedals, adjusting the mirrors to be able to see everything around them; and make certain that the gas tank has enough to get them where they are going and back. Sound like business principles to anyone? If you don’t do these things in a car, why would you do them in the business world? You probably wouldn’t. Lay the groundwork for a successful outing.

**MERGING ONTO THE HIGHWAY.** There are two ways to merge. The first is to get the car up to speed all the while checking your side and rear view mirrors to see what opening you have to seamlessly merge into the traffic flow. The second is the person who drives slowly onto the entrance ramp, hits the brakes just as they should be hitting the gas pedal and then *twerks* their body 45 degrees to look over their shoulder to see the oncoming traffic for the very first time, almost at the end of the ramp.

Traffic is now backed up behind you honking and rightfully so. Do you do your homework in advance so that your people can seamlessly merge into their

respective positions – or are they the ones in the fast lane passing those slow to merge into traffic?

**TURN SIGNAL.** I’ve experienced people who will put on their turn signal at the end of our parking lot to turn into the street, and we are in a cul-de-sac with only a few companies beyond us. Why waste the effort?

“As your company or project is gaining momentum, are you keeping your eyes up? Are you anticipating what is coming next before its only 200 feet from you?”

You should be able to see if anyone is coming out of their driveway and if you do indeed need to use your turn signal at that moment. I have never used my turn signal in that instance because I can anticipate what is happening traffic-wise.

It is just wasted effort when all you have to do is simply open your eyes and check out the surrounding conditions. Do you do this same thing in your daily routine? Do you waste effort needlessly when all you have to do is look around to see what is required?

**KEEP YOU EYES UP!** This is a term I garnered while on the racetrack. However, it applies to all of us in our daily driving habits as well as our business habits. As our car goes faster and faster, we tend to look down at the road right in front of us. What I am always telling my students is to keep their eyes up as they go faster.

I am dumbfounded when an entire string of cars hit their brakes about 200 feet from the police cruiser with radar in the highway median. It’s really fun to watch, and almost comical. As your company or project is gaining momentum, are you keeping your eyes up? Are you anticipating what is coming next before its only 200 feet from you?

I could go on and on but I really think that how we drive our cars is how we lead our lives to a huge extent.

Safe travels!

Rick

**Mark Zweig responds:**

Great stuff, Rick! I agree 100 percent. ▀▀



Rick Koehler,  
Chief Strategic  
Officer,  
ArchitectsPlus.

**WANT TO PITCH IN?** Send us your reaction to Mark Zweig’s editorials or any other article in **THE ZWEIG LETTER** and we will consider publishing your comments.

Send comments to João Ferreira, [jferreira@zweigwhite.com](mailto:jferreira@zweigwhite.com)

# Stop trying to do everything

Does everything you do fit your strategic orientation?  
If not, be ready to evaluate and pull the plug on certain areas.

**M**any companies can't seem to figure out how to say no or how to stop doing something. I see this often when helping firms with operational improvement and strategy projects.

It's human nature to respond enthusiastically to just about every opportunity. On the flip side, we shudder to stop, close or discontinue investing in something that doesn't deliver reasonable returns on the efforts or investment. Although some tough decisions were indeed made in the depths of the recession, now that the economy has improved markedly, I find more and more companies ignoring the obvious golden opportunities to make their organizations that much better.

Many more companies are now spending time formulating strategy and proactively planning the future. Those involved with this process are excited to find new ways to move the company forward now that market conditions have improved. Yet, these efforts don't always recognize that strategy is as much about what you are *not* going to do as it is about what you are going to do. Many leaders don't account for all that is not going well and instead focus almost entirely on initiatives that help determine where the company can go. However, all companies have parts of their business that are not performing well, have been marginalized, or do not fit the future. Assessing or "rationalizing" each and every aspect of what your company does is needed every so often.

**WHAT PART OF YOUR BUSINESS DO YOU RATIONALIZE?** Any portion of the business that is large enough to have a material impact the profitability of the firm, takes away precious human resources, financial capital, or leadership talent should be included. The process of rationalizing what you do brings clarity to not only the present but, more importantly, helps shape that desired future for the company. The very best firms periodically rationalize the markets they are focused in, clients or client groups, service offerings, initiatives that had been launched previously and are still not considered established and each established functional business unit in the firm. These functional units can include larger groups or departments, offices, regions, entire divisions or even subsidiaries.

**WHEN SHOULD YOU DO THIS?** The key is to perform this process often enough to identify and then change or exit those areas of the business that are not meeting expectations. It is equally important to not do this too fre-



Gerry Salontai

**GUEST  
SPEAKER**

quently, so not to cause disruption, instability or giving up on the area being evaluated too quickly. It can be done as part of strategic planning but care should be taken to avoid taking away from the creative thinking needed for the future. The result of this effort may be input to the planning process to help decide where the company will place its investments, including reinvesting in existing initiatives and exiting what is not working or does not fit in the future. The evaluation effort can also be carried out during the annual business planning process.

**WHO WOULD DO THIS?** You need to have your most objective thinkers in charge here. One key to make this process a success is to choose individuals not directly attached to the topical area, so independence is optimized. Generally, forming a small task group with specific areas to evaluate is an acceptable approach if a firm does not have one person that is well-rounded enough to cover all the areas being rationalized. An individual who is not

See GERRY SALONTAI, page 8

All companies have parts of their business that are not performing well, have been marginalized, or do not fit the future. Assessing or "rationalizing" each and every aspect of what your company does is needed every so often.

# 'Select our firm: We are local!'

Go deeper on the statements you make to potential clients.  
Convincing them to hire you takes a customized approach every time.

**H**ow many times have you used the “we’re local” crutch as one of your key points in a proposal or interview situation? Most clients don’t care about local unless you tell them why being local benefits them. Do you live in a community that values local business and there is a demonstrated selection of local businesses? Furthermore, does your specific client reflect those values and actually give you points for being local?

I hope you know how to answer those questions. If the answer to them is no, then you better tell the client why being local is good for them. We often offer weak reasons, such as: “Our firm is close to the project,” or “Someone in our firm lives near the project,” or “We have done other projects in the area.” Those weak associations will not advance your team in a competitive environment.

I was recently in a client’s office and had the opportunity to sit in on a proposal planning meeting for a municipal project. The project manager outlined their top three selling points and, low and behold, one of them was (drum roll please)... “We are local.” I challenged them as to what that meant. Did it mean that they would have lower project costs because their staff was 0.7 miles closer to the project than the competition? Would the client save money, headaches, or time by the firm being local? What does local mean? This particular firm has been competing with mainly much larger national firms that had a “local office” in the area. In other words, everyone could claim they were local. It turns out that this company did develop some strong statements that proved their local presence was superior to all others, but it took a lengthy discussion that resulted from being challenged. Most firms are satisfied with making a simple statement of being local and moving on to the next point.

Here’s the deal: Being local is often good in a service industry like ours; however, stating your firm is local rarely stands on its own as a value proposition. Furthermore, differentiators are not generic, especially in our business. Everybody reading this knows how close we are to being a commodity. What that means for all of us is that we must dig deep when defining the differentiators that set us apart from the competition. Tell your clients exactly what your benefits mean to them and how they translate to fit their mission. Anytime you can quantify the benefit, you will improve your chances even more. When developing your proposition around being local, you will need to look for the most powerful and quantifiable benefits your firm can uniquely offer your client. Also, consider that your job is to



Chad  
Clinehens

## BRAND BUILDING

educate the client on what the project needs are and that your team uniquely qualifies as the best team to meet those needs.

The next time you hear someone in your firm (or even yourself) say that being local is important to a project or client, take the time to challenge them. Challenge your firm to go deeper on the statements you are making to clients when selling to them. Convincing your clients to hire you takes a customized approach for every pursuit. Every project and every client is unique and so should what you offer them. Start improving your marketing and sales materials by asking the simple question: Why? ▽▲

CHAD CLINEHENS is ZweigWhite’s executive vice president. Contact him at [cclinehens@zweigwhite.com](mailto:cclinehens@zweigwhite.com).

Here’s the deal: Being local is often good in a service industry like ours; however, stating your firm is local rarely stands on its own as a value proposition. Furthermore, differentiators are not generic, especially in our business.

## HISTORY

# TZL time machine

## 10 years ago

Recruitment and retention are a major area of concern among A/E/P and environmental consulting firms, especially when the economy starts to warm.

The May 24, 2004 issue of **THE ZWEIG LETTER** (#563), dedicated two articles to the topic, one focusing on the use of sabbaticals for professional retooling; the other offering a case study on a successful in-house training program.

On the topic of sabbaticals: “While sabbaticals have long been popular and common in the academic world, few design firms have taken advantage of this benefit for senior management. In academia, sabbaticals provide professors with the opportunity not only to reenergize, but, more importantly, to stay on top of their game by conducting research and publishing work. Similarly, many firms in other industries offer sabbaticals to key managers as a way to prevent occupational burnout and for employees to bring back new knowledge to the firm.”

The article offered a list of points to consider, including:

- 1) Define the purpose.
- 2) Discuss goals and objectives.
- 3) Identify eligible candidates.
- 4) Outline the guidelines.

In his editorial, Mark Zweig wrote about what do to when the work environment goes sour, like rotten fruit. Here are his suggestions:

- Stop bickering with each other.

- Stop tolerating dysfunctional attitudes.
- Don't coddle the complainers.
- Confront cynicism head-on.
- Clean up the physical space.
- Change out some of the key players.
- Sell everyone on the Promised Land.
- Deliver some short-term results.

## 20 years ago

It's always a challenge to find the right leader for a new branch office. The May 30, 1994 issue of **THE ZWEIG LETTER** (#64), analyzed results from Zweig White's Satellite Office Survey of A/E/P & Environmental Consulting Firms, released in 1994, concluding that the number one make-or-break factor in starting and growing a satellite office is the manager.

The article offers some advice, including that new managers need:

- Strong marketing skills.
- Good leadership qualities.
- A sense of teamwork.
- Good technical skills.
- Some financial aptitude.
- Communications and people skills.
- Entrepreneurial spirit.

## GERRY SALONTAI, from page 6

invested or emotionally attached will make the best reviewer. In some cases, it is desirable to bring in some outside help using an industry-experienced person. Whether internal or not, an individual or a group of individuals who can bring market, strategic, financial and operational experience to the table are what's needed.

**WHAT QUESTIONS DO YOU ASK?** The rationalization process is all about determining what is working and what is not – especially with an eye toward the future. The very first question to ask is: How does this fit in our current and future company strategy? Many firms ignore this basic question and continue doing things that were never part of their strategy. The remaining questions vary depending on what aspect of the business you are rationalizing. For example, in evaluating a market sector or set of clients, you should ask questions regarding the fit with your business

model, profitability, effort to secure and maintain the relationships, and also if additional drain of effort by staff is required over and above time spent with the very best clients, and the risks associated with that. In the case of an operation, you should evaluate historical profitability, market potential and strategic significance. Additionally, evaluate whether your leadership talent would be better utilized in other efforts that will drive the company.

The rationalization process is all about ensuring the best use of your financial, talent and leadership resources to build value for the shareholders and all employees. The best firms focus on the “critical few” things that make a company successful. It is all about doing less and doing what you do well. ▀▲

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## RIGHT NOW

# The evolution of the proposal

Proposals have moved beyond the merely technical and are telling stories. They are also more visual and are being delivered in different formats.

By LIISA SULLIVAN  
Correspondent

While proposal writing is not going away, firms are witnessing a trend toward punchier styles and enhanced imagery. However, the public sector seems to be lagging behind the private sector when it comes to doing things in new ways.

**LESS IS MORE.** Gilbert Brindley, director of marketing, **H2M architects + engineers** (Melville, NY), a 225-person, full-service consulting and design firm, says that for the most part, proposal writing is really not much different today than from say 15 or 20 years ago.

He says that municipal, government and private proposals still include the same basic pieces and parts:

- Introduction to the firm
- Capabilities
- Staff
- Project approach
- Past experience

However, Brindley says that today's proposals are a lot more graphically oriented than proposals of the past.

"Today's proposals have fewer words, more pictures and more use of graphics, tables and charts wherever possible," he says. "At H2M, we try to take the approach that 'less is more.' We don't repeat ourselves. We also talk less about ourselves and more about the client, their project and their business."

**KEEP IT FRESH.** At H2M, proposal templates seem to change about every four to five years. Brindley says they are about due for a change.

"It helps to keep things fresh – gives us a new look and feel and helps our marketing and technical staff to feel good about our proposal product," he says. "And, from the client standpoint, it's nice to see something fresh and updated coming from our firm if we are a frequent proposer."



Gilbert Brindley,  
Director of  
Marketing,  
H2M architects +  
engineers.

## GOOD TO KNOW

Firms submitted a median of 124 proposals last year.

Source: 2013 Marketing Survey: [www.zweigwhite.com/p-2166-marketing-survey-2013](http://www.zweigwhite.com/p-2166-marketing-survey-2013)



Jason Robertson,  
Director BD,  
CRB Consulting  
Engineers, Inc.

For the most part, at H2M the delivery methods are the same. As a firm, they have learned to give an extra day for overnight delivery because of past delivery delays. This is particularly an issue during the holidays, wintertime, and whenever lots of shipping takes place (like Valentine's Day).

## SOCIAL MEDIA AS INFLUENCER

Brindley, Jensen and Robertson all agree that social media has affected the current state of proposals:

- "As a result of this fast-paced digital age, everyone has less time and patience to deal with long drawn out conversations, letters, and proposals," Brindley says.
- "Social media has set a new standard for written communication style – shorter, easier to scan and more enhanced imagery are replacing lengthier prose," Jensen says.
- "Social media has caused our attention spans to become even less focused, so capturing the attention of the reader is key," Robertson says.

"Commercial clients seem to be migrating toward online proposal systems where you have to upload materials in response to specific sections or questions," Brindley says. "I think this push is coming from the procurement or purchasing departments for the private entities."

**A NEED FOR SPEED.** Tamara Jensen, vice president, director of marketing, **Wight & Company** (Chicago, IL), a 175-person integrated design and construction firm, serving public and private markets, says that today's proposals are naturally taking cues from the digital world. They must be well organized to respond to the inherent "need for speed" when it comes to accessing information, while also being authentic, and emulating the candor with which experiences are shared on social media.

When responding to specific requests for proposals, Wight & Company is challenged to create a responsive and compliant submittal that is brief, yet creative. What works best for one client may not be right for another.

"For example, between public and private sector proposals, the latter typically offers much more flexibility for incorporating trends presented by the digital age," Jensen says. "Proposals for government and academia clients are stymied by RFQ/P formats and

See PROPOSALS, page 12

## WHAT'S WORKING

To celebrate their 25th anniversary, prosperous growth, and numerous other accolades, TPD decided to pair their event with the national "Take Our Daughters and Sons to Work Day" by inviting staff members and their children to indulge in anniversary cakes at each of their office locations, and a day of learning while training the "engineers of tomorrow."



### What's working:

- TPD celebrated the same event across seven different offices – an impressive accomplishment!
- Pairing a celebration with a national day and worthy cause is always a great idea.
- Press opportunities through fun, family-oriented, educational events.

### TPD CELEBRATES ITSELF AND NEXT GENERATION

**Traffic Planning and Design, Inc.** (Pottstown, PA), an award-winning transportation engineering firm serving the Mid-Atlantic region, started humbly enough. The company launched on April 17, 1989 in a remodeled three-story colonial house located in Oaks, Pa. with just six employees.

Dial the clock 25 years forward and TPD has grown into seven strategically located offices throughout Pennsylvania and New Jersey. To celebrate their 25th anniversary, prosperous growth, and numerous other accolades, TPD decided to pair their event with the national "Take Our Daughters and Sons to Work Day" by inviting staff members and their children to indulge in anniversary cakes at each of their office locations, and a day of learning while training the "engineers of tomorrow."

TPD continued the celebration at Hersheypark this month, where all seven offices gathered together for a day of fun in honor of their past successes and in anticipation of future endeavors.

For this campaign, TPD distributed a press release, posted to their website, and shared on social media pages (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Flickr). So far it has been a great success!

## WHAT'S WORKING

"It is truly a celebration of engineering and technology and a way to thank engineers for their contributions to humanity. It is our feeling here that engineers don't get enough credit for the work that they do, and this is our way of making up for it, in one small way."



### Watch on YouTube

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=9JyOiHvvRDA&feature=player\\_detailpage&list=UUIR-68AqlACIYXmrklxkwCw](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9JyOiHvvRDA&feature=player_detailpage&list=UUIR-68AqlACIYXmrklxkwCw)

**GETTING GROOVY WITH CSI** Computers & Structures, Inc. (Walnut Creek, CA), a developer of software tools for structural and earthquake engineering, holds a themed party every year as a way to bring members of the engineering community together in a non-conference, non-technical setting. The party is something that has to be seen to be believed.

"It is truly a celebration of engineering and technology and a way to thank engineers for their contributions to humanity. It is our feeling here that engineers don't get enough credit for the work that they do, and this is our way of making up for it, in one small way," says Miriam Storch, director of sales.

The process of choosing the theme every year is an informal but fun and creative exercise. CSI's CEO, Ashraf Habibullah, and Storch "kick around ideas until something feels right."

The invitation is designed in-house by CSI's graphic designer with input from Storch, Habibullah, and other staff members.

"We start with the theme and our designer puts together an idea board with different images, patterns and fonts that evoke the era, people, or places that are associated with the theme. It's printed by a very high-end printer in Belmont, Calif., who specializes in complex foil work. It's a fun process and every year's invitation is totally unique. Past themes have included Bollywood, Cirque du CSI, Moulin Rouge, and Fabulous Las Vegas," Storch says.

This year's party was a "Swingin' 60s theme," and had many attendees in full costume with 60s-themed music, dancing, live entertainment, and an incredible array of food and drinks.

About 1,000 people attend the party every year. CSI has held the party at San Francisco City Hall Rotunda in this format, with roughly the same attendance, every spring since 2009.

## AWARD WINNERS

**BRIGHTFIELDS RECOGNIZED BY THE SBA:** **Marian Young** and **Mark Lannan**, co-owners of **BrightFields, Inc.** (Wilmington, DE), a 42-person environmental consulting and remediation firm, have been selected by the U.S. Small Business Administration as the 2014 Delaware Small Business Persons of the Year.

Young and Lannan were honored in Washington, D.C., on May 15-16, during the 2014 National Small Business Week Awards, and were recognized at SBA's annual Delaware "Celebrate Success" event on May 21.

This is the second time the BrightFields' owners have received this award, as Young and Lannan were previously honored as the Delaware 2008 Small Business Persons of the Year. Young and Lannan were nominated for the 2014 award by Juanita Beauford, program director at the University of Delaware SBTDC Procurement Technical Assistance Center, who has served as an advisor to BrightFields in the areas of state and federal marketing and procurement.

"We are extremely honored to be selected," Young said. "The Award really goes to ALL of BrightFields' team for their faith in the company, for the incredibly hard work they personally put in to pull BrightFields out of the recession, and for their commitment to grow and expand our service lines and our geographic footprint."

**FIRMS WIN AWARD FOR BRIDGE DESIGN:** **Finley Engineering Group** (Tallahassee, FL), a specialty complex bridge design and construction engineering firm, **CHA** (Albany, NY), a multidisciplinary engineering firm, and **Harrison and Burrowes Bridge Constructors** received the 2014 American Council of Engineer award for the complex bridge design and construction engineering work on the Checkered House Bridge Design-Build project, located in Richmond, Vt.

Built in 1929, the Checkered House Bridge is a 350 foot-long steel truss bridge placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1990. This project is only the second design-build project undertaken by the Vermont Agency of Transportation since design-build project delivery was authorized by the Vermont legislature. This was the first

time that a steel truss bridge this size was widened.

This rehabilitation and widening project had to satisfy Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1996 and Section 4(f) of the U.S. Department of Transportation requirements. Approximately 12 feet, 6 inches were added to its width, making it a total of 36 feet wide from truss to truss. This project included two 11-foot travel lanes and two 3.5 foot shoulders, increasing the travel surface from 20 feet to 29 feet. Other challenges included ice flows, wind loading, maintaining aesthetics and sensitive environmental issues.

The design-build team of Harrison & Burrows and CHA brought in FINLEY early in the bid process to do the following: conceptual design, falsework design, launching system design, construction manual, falsework/launching system inspection and on-site launching technical assistance.

**ORTEGA BESTOWED:** The University of Houston Alumni Association has selected **Rafael Ortega**, vice president of **Lockwood, Andrews & Newnam, Inc.** (Houston, TX), a 250-person full-service consulting firm, as a 2014 Distinguished Alumni Award Honoree. The award was presented at UHAA's 60th Annual Awards Gala on April 26.

The Distinguished Alumni Award is given to individuals whose professional accomplishments have brought credit to the university.

Ortega joined LAN in 1981 and has worked on numerous projects impacting the quality of life for Houstonians. These marquee projects include the construction of the city of Houston's 69th Street wastewater treatment plant, the Northside Sewer Relief Tunnels, and the city's Surface Water Transmission Program.

As vice president, he directs the LAN business group that focuses on large diameter pipelines. He is one of the nation's leading experts on large diameter pipelines and has been instrumental in supporting the city of Houston's conversion of its drinking water source from groundwater to surface water. Ortega has designed more than 300 miles of large diameter pipelines, including over 50 miles of large diameter tunnels.

## PROPOSALS, from page 9

requirements that have not changed in a decade or more. Often found among these requirements is the need for numerous bound, hardcopy submittals. This stipulation alone significantly limits the creative options for proposal format. On the other end of the spectrum, a forward-thinking private sector client may only request a digital link to the proposal submittal (usually a PDF or interactive PDF), which opens the door for a more creative proposal format that incorporates interactivity, mouse-over content, hyperlinks, videos and/or flash."

Over the last several years, Wight & Company has explored various delivery formats for digital content beyond PDF or interactive PDF submittals.

"Third-party online software such as Prezi and Flip-Book-Online can be used to enhance the user experience and overall quality of the presented material," Jensen says.

**TELL A STORY.** Jason Robertson, director business development **CRB Consulting Engineers, Inc.** (Kansas City, MO), a 675-person global network of consultants, engineers, architects and constructors, says that he does not see the "traditional" proposal going away for the AEC industry anytime soon. However, he too sees a trend where the key

"Instead of paragraphs of project-execution approach detail, the approach is now one that tells a story with graphics or renderings. This approach seems to make more of an impact and is easier to understand by people with less construction experience."

themes included in proposals are changing.

"Instead of paragraphs of project-execution approach detail, the approach is now one that tells a story with graphics or renderings," he says. "This approach seems to make more of an impact and is easier to understand by people with less construction experience."

Over the past few years, CRB has done a major proposal overhaul. Now, they are much more "graphically pleasing."

"We use more pull quotes and matrices to shorten the proposals and make them easier for clients to skim and tell the essence of our story," Robertson says. "We're also sending more electronic proposals than we used to." ▀▄