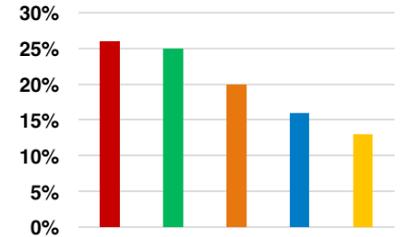


TRENDLINES

Amount of time on marketing



Presidents, CEOs, and managing partners, on average devote at least 26 percent percent of their time to marketing, while **other principals** spend 25 percent of their time on marketing, according to the 2016 *Marketing Survey*. **Branch office managers** spend 20 percent, followed by **department managers** (16 percent) and **project managers** (13 percent).

(Special discount for TZL subscribers: Use code **SPRINGMKT15** to order this survey at 15 percent off on zweiggroup.com)

FIRM INDEX

Aegion Corporation	2
Alta Planning + Design.....	6
Hargrove Controls + Automation	4
Maser Consulting P.A.....	3, 4
McMahon Associates Inc.....	10
OLIN.....	7
Primoris Services Corporation.....	10
SWT Design	7

The problem with introverts

“So you’re an introvert in an extrovert’s world. What can you do about it? You CAN employ some techniques that will make people like you more.”



Mark Zweig

EDITORIAL

Introverts have a problem. But before you start typing your letter to me complaining about this article, please read it fully! Now in my 37th year of working with architects, engineers, planners, landscape architects, land surveyors, and scientists, I have met many introverts over the years. In fact, some of my best friends from this business are undoubtedly introverts. But that doesn’t change the fact that introverts **DO** have a problem. That problem is that extroverts think they (the introverts), don’t like them.

“So why is that such a big deal?” you may ask. It’s an issue because so many clients – as well as the leaders and coworkers inside the company – may be extroverts. If you are an introvert and any of these people think you don’t like them, it will hurt your relationships with them. That, in turn, will hurt your opportunities throughout your career.

So you’re an introvert in an extrovert’s world. What can you do about it? You **CAN** employ some techniques that will make people like you more. Here are a five of them:

- 1) Greet people cheerfully!** When you seem glum, or unwilling to talk, it makes people think you don’t like them. Practice your greeting! Be the first one to say “Hi” or “Good morning” instead of always responding to someone else. Be cheerful and positive. Know what you’ll say before you say it. And smile! Everyone likes people who seem happy.
- 2) Look at people when you talk to them or when they talk to you.** There’s an old joke about how to tell if an engineer is an extrovert or not. The punchline is the extrovert is

See MARK ZWEIG, page 2

MORE COLUMNS

- FINANCIAL FITNESS: A transformative process [Page 5](#)
- CONTINUING ED: Nodding your head [Page 9](#)
- M&A INSIGHTS: Questions and answers [Page 11](#)

Strategic planning

Page 3

Greener grass

Page 6

BUSINESS NEWS

AEGION CORPORATION AND MATERIA, INC. PARTNER TO COMMERCIALIZE A NEW PIPE INSULATION TECHNOLOGY FOR THE SHELL APPOMATTOX PROJECT Aegion Corporation announced it is on schedule to begin this fall pipe coating and the application of an innovative pipe insulation material for use on the Shell Appomattox project. The insulation material vendor for the project, Materia, Inc., is also on schedule with respect to the project. Shell Offshore, Inc., a wholly owned subsidiary of Royal Dutch Shell plc, selected Aegion's subsidiary, The Bayou Companies, LLC, to provide the pipe coating and insulation for the Appomattox development located in the deep water of the Gulf of Mexico.

Aegion is collaborating with Materia to supply Materia's Proxima HTI-1400 subsea insulation system for the project. The newly developed thermosetting cross-linked hydrocarbon polymer system provides a robust thermal barrier between flowlines and seawater. The insulation system is a stable incompressible solid in deep water environments involving water depths greater than 10,000 feet. Materia recently completed the first phase of the required expansion of its Huntsville, Texas facility to produce the new thermal insulation material and is proceeding with the commissioning process. The second phase of the expansion is expected to occur in the second and third quarters of 2016, which would meet the schedule for full-scale production this fall.

A state-of-the-art insulation coating facility designed for the Appomattox project is currently under construction at Bayou's New Iberia, Louisiana location, where Bayou will provide anti-corrosion pipe coating and ancillary services. Bayou Wasco Insulation LLC a joint venture between Aegion and Malaysia-based

Wasco Energy Ltd is a leader in proprietary insulation coatings and is uniquely suited to service the deep water pipeline market in the Gulf of Mexico. In partnership with Materia and Shell, Bayou Wasco has developed the proprietary ACS HT-200 pipe insulation coating application process. Bayou is currently receiving specialized equipment for the insulation application as construction on the new facility continues for completion this summer. Bayou expects to begin insulation application production during the fourth quarter of 2016.

Charles R. Gordon, Aegion's president and CEO, said, "Our collaboration with Materia demonstrates our commitment to work with customers to provide world-class coating, insulation, logistics and prefabrication solutions. The new proprietary pipe insulation application process will permit safe and efficient transportation of crude oil from deep water oil field developments in the Gulf of Mexico. We are proud of our capabilities to provide large-scale project support to Shell and remain committed to providing high-quality pipeline corrosion protection, flow assurance and other services for their pipeline assets in the Gulf Coast region."

Nitin Apte, Materia's president and CEO, commented, "Materia's thermal insulation provides a simple and cost-effective solution to the challenges of deep water oil and gas production. The selection of Bayou, Bayou Wasco and Materia to provide the insulation system for the subsea Appomattox oil reserve operating environment validates Bayou Wasco's insulating expertise and Materia's state-of-the-art material science technology, which provides an innovative and robust technology solution for pipeline flow assurance."

MARK ZWEIG, from page 1

looking at your feet instead of their own when they talk. Don't be like that. Look up at the person you're speaking with. They will think you are more interested in what they have to say and like you better because of it.

3) Watch your body language. Stand up straight. Don't shirk away. Don't plaster yourself up against the hall wall when the fast walking extrovert comes up behind you, either. Looking alive and alert and energized is going to engender more positive feelings toward you from others – especially extroverts.

4) Ask a lot of questions. Most people like to talk about themselves. Even if you don't, use the information to your favor. Ask questions. Let the other guy talk. Ask more questions. Always turn the conversation back to them. They – the extroverts – will love you for it.

5) Use written communication channels. The fact is that introverts may not be as verbal as they should be to serve their own interests, but that doesn't mean they can't write. If this is you, use the email channel to communicate emotion, enthusiasm, and energy to the other people you are communicating with. Be fast with your replies. Use an exclamation point every now and then. Make your written communications seem energetic.

Disagree with me if you like, but sorry – I know I'm right about this subject. These five pointers, if you'd employ them, will make you more successful! ▀

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PROFILE



From left, Leonardo E. Ponzio, executive vice president and CAO, Richard M. Maser, chairman and CEO, and Kevin L. Haney, president and COO.

Strategic planning

New Jersey's Maser Consulting promotes two, but founder remains in CEO role to ensure long-term stability as firm eyes growth.

By LIISA ANDREASSEN
Correspondent

More than 30 years ago, Richard M. Maser founded **Maser Consulting P.A.** (Best Firm Multidiscipline #5 and Hot Firm #12 for 2015), in Red Bank, New Jersey. Known for its diversification of services and its strategy of national expansion, the firm grew into an engineering consulting enterprise of 650 professionals.

As part of the strategic plan, Maser is passing along the presidential reins. While he will remain chairman and CEO of the firm, Kevin L. Haney will take over as president and Leonardo E. Ponzio will move into the position of executive vice president. Haney and Ponzio will also continue to maintain their previous responsibilities as COO and CAO, respectively.

A CHANGING OF THE GUARD. Maser will continue to seek opportunities to strengthen and provide long-term stability for the firm while steering the company's direction for success.

"We've been discussing ownership and management transition for several years and the plan has

been evolving over the last three years," Maser says.

Haney was a strategic hire with a strong technical knowledge of the multiple disciplines and services the company offers and has extensive knowledge of the commercial and private development communities. He spent more than three years working with Maser, who helped him learn the public side of the business through strengthening business relationships.

"We've been discussing ownership and management transition for several years and the plan has been evolving over the last three years."

"I'm pleased to be entrusted with this leadership responsibility, and I appreciate having the support and confidence of our shareholders," Haney says. "I look forward to continuing to work in unison with Ponzio in driving the firm's tactical direction."

See MASER, page 4



BUSINESS NEWS

HARGROVE CONTROLS + AUTOMATION NAMED INTEGRATOR OF THE YEAR Hargrove Controls + Automation received the Control System Integrators Association's 2016 Integrator of the Year award, which was presented to Matt Burton, PE, operations leader of Hargrove Controls + Automation, at the annual CSIA Executive Conference in Puerto Rico. The award recognizes a member company who has participated significantly in the advancement of the association and profession of control system integration.

Hargrove Controls + Automation is one of few multi-service automation groups in the country for safety systems, industrial IT, and plant automation. Since its inception in 2012, Hargrove's C+A team has grown to more than 80 control systems engineers and specialists across eight of Hargrove's 11 offices. The team consists of panel builders, instrumentation designers, programmers, certified process safety engineers and process control engineers specializing in DCS/PLC/SIS system integration.

When asked what sets Hargrove Controls +

Automation apart, Burton said, "By teaming with Hargrove on both engineering design and automation, our clients are able to lower their risk, increase communication and planning from the start, as well as reduce change, and – ultimately – complete their project goals quicker and at a better value."

CSIA helps its members improve their business skills, provides a forum to share industry expertise, and promotes best practices for business management.

"To be recognized on a national level from such a prestigious organization is a true honor for the Hargrove team," said Burton.

MASER CONSULTING OPENS NEW OFFICE IN PITTSBURGH Maser Consulting P.A., a national multi-discipline engineering firm, announced that it has established a new office in Pittsburgh – its fourth office in Pennsylvania. This new location affirms the company's strategic plan to expand geographically while providing increased service to its public and private clients within the western Pennsylvania, eastern Ohio, and West Virginia regions.

Adam Henger, regional business development director, and Chris Grady, business development executive, have been hired to lead the firm's commitment to implementing a complete array of services at this location.

"Our firm has been embedded in Pennsylvania for almost a decade serving the greater Lehigh Valley and Philadelphia communities," stated Kevin L. Haney, president/COO of Maser Consulting P.A. "This new office enables us to better serve our clients by strengthening coverage within the state."

Maser Consulting has been involved with many viable projects within the state, wholly or in sync with local entities. Some of its most notable work includes projects for Temple University, Williams Transco Constitution pipeline, Philadelphia Airport, Walt Whitman Bridge Toll Plaza, Tacony-Palmyra Bridge, Philadelphia Airport, and the Hoover-Mason Trestle in Bethlehem which just won *Engineering News Record's* Best of the Best Award for Landscape/Urban Development project in both mid-Atlantic and national competitions.

MASER, from page 3

Haney is a professional licensed engineer in the state of New Jersey with more than 20 years of combined experience in civil/site engineering consulting for retail, commercial, industrial, institutional, and residential developments, in addition to daily business operations management. As president, he will be responsible for the management of the technical side of the firm, including oversight of the firm's day-to-day operations, business development activities, and execution of the firm's strategic growth plan.

Ponzio, who has also been working alongside Maser, virtually since the inception of the company, has been an integral part of developing the firm's essential operational infrastructure. His business administration acumen has helped the growth of each department to keep astride of the company's continued expansion.

"Having been with the company for nearly 30 years, I'm proud to have played an integral role in growing the firm to what it is today. I'm excited about this new structure and look forward to what the future holds for Maser Consulting."

"Having been with the company for nearly 30 years, I'm proud to have played an integral role in growing the firm to what it is today," Ponzio says. "I'm excited about this new structure and look forward to what the future holds for Maser Consulting."

Ponzio has more than 30 years of experience in land

"We will continue to expand our geographic presence throughout the country, while focusing on staff integration and retention, production efficiency, and quality control."

surveying and supervision of the survey management team. He is dedicated to supporting the division's adherence to quality assurance and quality control standards while ensuring his team uses the most technologically advanced equipment and systems available. As executive vice president, Ponzio will provide the leadership to oversee the firm's operational departments nationwide including the accounting and finance, IT, building operations, marketing and human resources departments, while coordinating their development in stride with the firm's growth.

WHAT'S AHEAD? Maser Consulting is sticking to its strategic plan for growth. For the next two to three years, its goals include achieving projected revenue and profit goals while maintaining the corporate culture of being a large company with a small company feel.

"We will continue to expand our geographic presence throughout the country, while focusing on staff integration and retention, production efficiency, and quality control," Haney says.

Additionally, in order to maintain the continuity of its satellite offices as they grow, Maser will continue to reinforce its branding. Future plans also include the expansion of seller-doer training to further grow market share.

Exciting times are ahead for Maser Consulting. ▀

OPINION



A transformative process

If a firm is to achieve something spectacular, its leaders have to have big hearts, and they have to galvanize the entire staff.



Ted
Maziejka

FINANCIAL

FITNESS

One of the most rewarding things we do as consultants is guide a client through the strategic planning and business planning process.

We often spend more than 16 weeks interviewing the leadership team and the firm's clients. Some people might have good things to say, others not so much. We conduct anonymous online surveys with the employees. We amass, review, and analyze an enormous amount of data – financial, organizational, human resources, and even past strategic plans – anything that will give us a window into the firm so we can understand it better.

This effort translates into a review document that assesses, evaluates, and recommends improvements to the firm in many areas. It often is a 150-plus page document that is distributed for review prior to a two-day onsite meeting with as many as 30 people. Sometimes they approach this exercise with doubts, fears, and preconceived ideas about what will occur. Our role is to facilitate the process and turn the experience into a solid 10 for all involved. It's exhausting and rewarding all at

the same time.

The process, to be truly transformative, allows all the participants to share their thoughts and opinions, and many times, these are the very leaders who will implement the vision with the support of their studios, offices, or lines of business, taking the firm into a future that requires them to stretch out of what is comfortable and achieve the extraordinary.

As we move the participants through this process, and hearing many diverse and different approaches to the practice of architecture, engineering and planning, part of the transformation that occurs is to identify what many perceive as ordinary parts of the design effort.

Many elements of the work effort, due to the

See TED MAZIEJKA, page 8



SPOTLIGHT ON: Land

PROFILE



This project by SWT Design, at the Novus International headquarters in Missouri, was certified under the SITES pilot program. / SWT Design

Greener grass

New rating system for sustainable landscapes is expected to broaden the A/E/P market for work outside the building envelope.



Skip Graffam,
partner, OLIN



Hunter
Beckham,
Senior
Landscape
Architect, Alta
Planning +
Design

By RICHARD MASSEY
Managing Editor

The recent adoption of ecological and sustainability standards by the U.S. General Services Administration is expected to open new and profitable markets for landscape architecture firms, and the A/E/P industry in general, as the new rating system – Certified, Silver, Gold, and Platinum – applies only to what’s outside the building envelope.

In April, the GSA announced it will use the Sustainable Sites Initiative, or SITES, for its robust capital construction program. SITES, administered by Green Business Certification Inc., an affiliate of the U.S. Green Building Council, functions like LEED, except it’s designed to measure the performance and increase the value of sustainable landscapes.

In the works since at least 2008, the SITES certification process, after a lengthy pilot program, is now open for firms to participate. And with the GSA on board, the potential is extreme. One of the largest and most diversified public real estate organizations in the world, the GSA has a portfolio that includes 376.9 million rentable square feet, 8,721

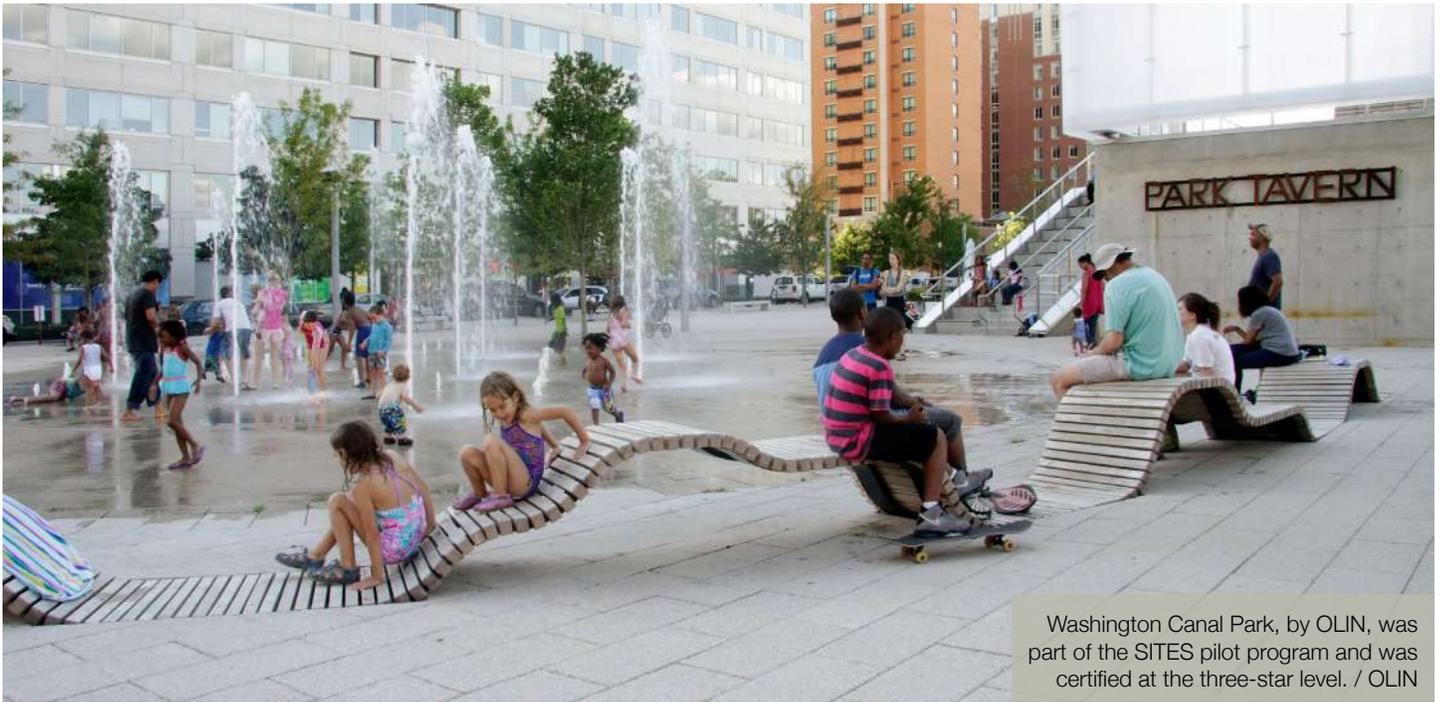
assets, more than 144,000 acres of land, and control over ports of entry and historical properties.

The GSA recently flexed its muscle when it announced a \$947 million investment in federal courthouses across the country.

“It starts with a big confidence boost. It gives landscape architects the chance to be the prime on a project. It elevates the importance of what landscape architects bring to the table.”

Hunter Beckham, a senior landscape architect at **Alta Planning + Design**, a 180-person firm with more than 30 offices across the country, says the new SITES standards will be a boon to an industry that is already enjoying a momentous upswing.

“It starts with a big confidence boost,” he says of SITES. “It gives landscape architects the chance



Washington Canal Park, by OLIN, was part of the SITES pilot program and was certified at the three-star level. / OLIN

to be the prime on a project. It elevates the importance of what landscape architects bring to the table.”

While at **SWT Design**, Beckham participated in the SITES pilot program, and in that time two of his projects were certified. With those projects in his portfolio, he is considered an expert in the rating system, a designation that sets him and his firm up for consulting.

“Now that the rating system is out, it gives me an opportunity to connect with partners I haven’t done business with before,” Beckham says. “They’ll want an expert so they don’t waste a lot of time [on a project].”

In addition to the expected trickle down of SITES standards to state and local governments, a potential source of new business is with construction firms and A/E/P firms that deal exclusively with the GSA. Looking at how big the agency is, Beckham has this to say: “The numbers are staggering. Once you get in [with government work], it would be hard to be bored.”

Landscape architecture in the United States dates to the initial development of Central Park in the 1850s. Since then, according to a 2012 report published by the National Endowment for the Arts, the industry has grown to a value of around \$2.3 billion a year, a figure that has likely increased. The NEA report also found that U.S. landscape architecture firms export their services to clients around the world. As of 2014, there were about 22,500 people working in the landscape architecture field, according to the U.S. Department of Labor.

The recession gutted the industry, and in Q4 2009, 84

percent of firms said they were not planning on hiring in Q1 of the following year, according to the quarterly survey conducted by the American Society of Landscape Architects. By Q4 2015, however, only 54 percent of firms said they were not planning on hiring in Q1 of the following year. At the end of 2015, according to the survey, firms reported positive results in billable hours, work enquiries, and business results.

“Now that the rating system is out, it gives me an opportunity to connect with partners I haven’t done business with before. They’ll want an expert so they don’t waste a lot of time [on a project].”

Philadelphia- and Los Angeles-based **OLIN**, considered one of the top landscape architecture firms in the country, participated in the SITES pilot program through Washington Canal, a multifaceted urban park in Washington, D.C. The process increased the overall capabilities of the firm, which now finds itself in the enviable role of SITES educator and peer reviewer.

“Familiarity with the rating system in the beginning gives you a leg up,” says OLIN partner Skip Graffam. “You understand how much it will cost. We bring it up with our clients early in the conversation. It helps us serve the owner better.”

See LANDSCAPE, page 8

TED MAZIEJKA, from page 5

longevity of the participants in the respective practice, are often perceived as ordinary elements of the work that they do; the plumbing detail, the culvert design, the space plan, the fenestration design, the electric load calculation, the Phase 1 study and the structural load calculation. The reality is that these are all extraordinary efforts, brought about by equally extraordinary staff members who have forgotten that attitude and approach can be transformative. If the senior leaders can rally around the concept that everything is extraordinary, there is an ability to inject new energy into their departments by transforming the attitudes of their staff.

The development of a tangible, quantifiable vision is often started by the suggestion that all areas of the firm need to move from one level of revenue to a radical look forward over five years. Often this amounts to doubling, tripling, or quadrupling revenue growth.

“The development of a tangible, quantifiable vision is often started by the suggestion that all areas of the firm need to move from one level of revenue to a radical look forward over five years.”

Recently, with a planning session involving both senior leaders in their late 50s and early 60s, and a mid-level leadership team ranging from their early 30s to late 40s, the collective decision took the firm from \$15 million in annual gross revenue to more than \$50 million by 2020. This transformative plan was crafted on day one, and on day two, we asked how that \$50-million goal felt after a good night’s sleep.

One brave soul raised their hand and stated what many felt: “This plan was sheer terror and fear.” But they were reassured by the senior leaders that they stood behind the plan and would commit the resources required to

LANDSCAPE, from page 7

Graffam noted the vast reach of the GSA, which has properties in dense urban areas as well as in rural environments. In the process of outfitting GSA properties with SITES certified landscaping, valuable development models are bound to emerge, a positive for the industry, Graffam says.

He also says that the GSA, with its size and influence, will likely affect the approach state and local governments will take when considering their green spaces.

“They [environmental standards] become less novel and

achieve this epic vision. The new president was equally passionate in his commitment to reassure the team that there would be no obstacles standing in the way of creating a transformation. WOW!

“Revenue growth that is this transformative has so many components and every facet of the organization has to engage in the effort.”

Revenue growth that is this transformative has many components, and every facet of the organization has to engage in the effort. Business development goals, management goals, production and staffing needs, potential merger and acquisition strategies, technology, and new ways of staffing and planning. The firm must commit to assess and manage the strategic vision by reviewing the monthly or quarterly goals. The only way success can be achieved is by always keeping everyone’s eye on the prize.

Transformation ultimately drives down to the staff level, and what will their impact be on how the firm achieves its established goals? By participating and being invited to engage in the process!

Truly transformative change can often start with the third tier, the 25 to 30 year olds who should be valued for their ability to think outside the box, review processes, and create efficiencies through an unfiltered view of how work can be accomplished.

And here is the true secret of transformative change. In *The Truth about Leadership*, by James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posners, the 10th point focuses on the concept that “Leadership Requires Heart.” In other words, care and concern are the foundations of great leaders. Positive leadership generates positive emotion and, in that space, teams can create amazing and extraordinary results! ▀

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“Familiarity with the rating system in the beginning gives you a leg up. You understand how much it will cost. We bring it up with our clients early in the conversation. It helps us serve the owner better.”

become the way business is done,” Graffam says. “As GSA goes, so will go the others.” ▀

“The U.S. General Services Administration’s decision to adopt SITES for its capital construction projects shows incredible leadership. The GSA’s public buildings service is one of the largest and most diversified public real estate programs in the world, and by adopting the SITES rating system, GSA will align land development and management with innovative sustainable design that will protect and enhance the benefits we derive from healthy functioning landscapes. This is another great step in scaling up the SITES program and elevating the value of landscapes in the built environment.” — *Jamie Statter, vice president of strategic relationships, U.S. Green Building Council*



Nodding your head

It's easy to spout acronyms, tell inside jokes, and use empty jargon, but oftentimes, people are just pretending to know what you mean.



**Bill
Murphey**

**CONTINUING
ED**

Have you ever been in one of those meetings where a topic came up or an acronym reared its ugly head and you found yourself thinking that you're probably the only person in the room who has no idea what everyone is talking about? I've been there multiple times. It's an uncomfortable feeling. It's the joke everyone laughs at, but you don't understand. You just politely smile and nod your head.

I saw this in action years ago while teaching a master's level class on global logistics. My fellow instructor and I created an outstanding presentation with all kinds of facts, figures, and diagrams, and spent a day talking about logistics processes and the importance of "Tip-fid" discipline and what can happen if one doesn't "follow the Tip-fid." We fostered excellent dialogue with and among the two dozen graduate students. As an instructor, there's nothing better than when you know your students "got it."

Except none of our students "got it." The day after we returned home, I received an email from one of the students whom I had known for several years. He asked me if he could interview me as a subject matter expert for his thesis paper and then in a somewhat sheepish manner, he added at the bottom of the email: "By the way, what's a 'Tip-fid?'"

In this case, I was referring to Time-Phased Force Deployment Data, a standard term to describe the priority process used to move Department of Defense people and equipment. It's a well-known term, but only if you've been exposed to that level of logistics, which was not the case for my students. So, who was at fault for the confusion? Why, that was me. The next time I taught that course, I spent a half hour describing the term and its meaning, and the class went so much better than the first one.

Is there something you say on a regular basis that you assume everyone around you understands, but in reality they may have no clue what you're talking about? Is there an acronym or saying you use that may have different meanings to different audiences?

See BILL MURPHEY, page 10



BUSINESS NEWS

PRIMORIS SERVICES CORPORATION ANNOUNCES UNDERGROUND AND INDUSTRIAL AWARD VALUED AT \$500 MILLION Primoris Services Corporation announced a new Master Service Agreement, which Primoris anticipates will generate approximately \$500 million of revenues from a California utility customer. The contract was secured jointly by the underground and industrial divisions of ARB Inc., part of the West Construction Services segment.

- The award is a five-year engineering, procurement, and construction agreement across all lines of the utility's business, including both gas and electric transmission and distribution.
- The agreement covers work in power substations, high voltage power transmission lines, compressor stations, and hydro-electric plants.
- It is estimated that the MSA will generate approximately \$100 million per year over

the course of the contract, based upon the customer provided anticipated needs for the project. The agreement does not obligate the customer to award Primoris a specific dollar amount. Primoris will subcontract the engineering requirements of the MSA.

MCMAHON ASSOCIATES INC. KICKS OFF YEAR OF CELEBRATION TO COMMEMORATE FIRM'S 40TH ANNIVERSARY McMahon Associates Inc., a transportation engineering and planning firm, announced the launch of a year-long celebration of the firm's 40th anniversary. Since starting in 1976 on the kitchen table at Joe and Peggy McMahon's home in North Hills, Pennsylvania, the firm has grown to 13 offices in six states along the East Coast with more than 150 employees.

"When we sat down that day in 1976 and decided to go for it, we had no idea that 40 years later we would be celebrating this incredible milestone," said Joe McMahon, chairman of the board. "We started with the idea of creating a place that was great to work

at. We have always focused on our people being our most valuable asset, along with sticking to our mission of providing exceptional client service. This has been the secret to our success and longevity."

"This year is certainly a special one for everyone at McMahon," said Joseph DeSantis, president. "I've been with the firm for nearly 30 years and I'm proud of our adaptability and tenacity in this always changing industry. When McMahon was originally founded, we focused on traffic services for the private sector, but over these past decades our services, and geographic areas, have grown exponentially into multiple markets and the public sector, which is now the majority of our projects.

"We have truly morphed, through careful decision-making and strategic planning, into a full-service transportation engineering and planning company. We could not have accomplished this without the talents and dedication of our employees and our management team."

BILL MURPHEY, from page 9

- How confident are you that your clients understand everything you've proposed to them?
- How many sports analogies do you make in your daily conversations? Have you ever called "audible" on a project or asked someone to "take a knee" when presented with a scope change request?
- Do your biweekly production meetings occur twice a week or every other week?

Unambiguous speech is a force multiplier. It gets everyone moving in the same direction, as opposed to the classic, "I'm turning left, right?" There are several things you can do to help others avoid that uncomfortable feeling of not knowing what you're talking about.

- Avoid using acronyms outside of your organization. If you must use acronyms in a presentation, spell them out the first time you use them.
- Build and maintain a master list of acronyms and commonly used terms in your organization. They are immensely helpful for your new hires. They can also make a great addition to your contract proposal to ensure there's no ambiguity between your firm and your client's firm.

"The next time I taught that course, I spent a half hour describing the term and its meaning, and the class went so much better than the first one."

- Sometimes using acronyms with a client can signal to them that you understand their issue on a deeper level or even that you understand their company's culture. Cover yourself and use the full phrase at least once to confirm your understanding of the acronym is the same as your client's understanding.

"If you're leading a meeting, make sure you understand the audience before you begin. If your discussion ventures into areas possibly unknown to others, throw them a lifeline and provide a brief summary or background on the concept at hand."

- Know your audience. If you're leading a meeting, make sure you understand the audience before you begin. If your discussion ventures into areas possibly unknown to others, throw them a lifeline and provide a brief summary or background on the concept at hand.
- Avoid using faddish terms found in the latest business management books. What exactly is a BHAG? And I don't know anything about your cheese or care about what's in your bucket or what color hat you're wearing. Chances are most people will not have read those books and they may view you as a smug bloviator. Don't get me wrong. I have my favorite business books, but if I'm going to make a reference to a concept I found in a book, I translate it so that everyone around me understands the point I'm trying to make.
- Minimize the use of slang. The Pentagon is a breeding ground for such extraneous nothingness. If I had a dollar for every time I heard about a "self-licking ice cream cone" – code for a purposeless, self-serving process – or a dog that won't hunt, I'd be a rich man. It literally took me months to figure out the thing about the ice cream cone.

I don't know anyone who likes to be the person who doesn't get the inside joke. Do your clients and your audience a favor and speak in terms they'll understand, because not everyone will get everything you're saying – even if they're smiling and nodding their heads. ■

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Questions and answers

When positioning your firm for a potential sale, you should be prepared to talk about all facets of the organization, not just the C-suite.



Jamie
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M&A INSIGHTS

As an M&A consultant, I come into contact with sellers of all varieties. From “Maybe it’s time to start planning our exit” sellers, to “Get me out of here yesterday” sellers. Anyone considering an external ownership transition should be prepared to answer a few questions that come up in every M&A conversation. You only get one chance to have a first conversation with a potential buyer; you would be well-served by spending some time thinking about answers to the questions that are always raised.

1) Why are you considering a sale? This one sounds like a no-brainer, but having an honest answer to this question opens up the dialogue in a way that nothing else does. A candid answer to this question starts the discussion with a tone of trust and credibility that are essential to moving the conversation forward.

“Remember that the person on the other end of the phone has already looked up your firm; they know what is on the website.”

2) Tell me about your firm. Sellers need to be prepared to “sell” their firm to the party on the other end of the phone. According to IBIS World, there are 143,172 engineering services firms, and 72,346

architecture firms in the U.S. What makes your firm one in a couple-hundred thousand? Be able to articulate what makes your firm special (i.e. valuable!), and make an impression on the prospective buyer that they will not soon forget.

3) What are your plans after the sale? I try not to “coach” sellers to give specific answers to questions, but this one, specifically, is my exception to the rule. I don’t have a right answer to this, but I can tell you that the wrong answer is that you plan to retire immediately after closing. If that is the truth, then be aware that leaving the firm before the ink is dry on the transaction documents will drive down your value considerably. The business you have built up will need you to maintain stability for some period of time before you pass the baton to the buyer. Letting the prospective buyer know that you’d like to

See JAMIE CLAIRE KISER, page 12

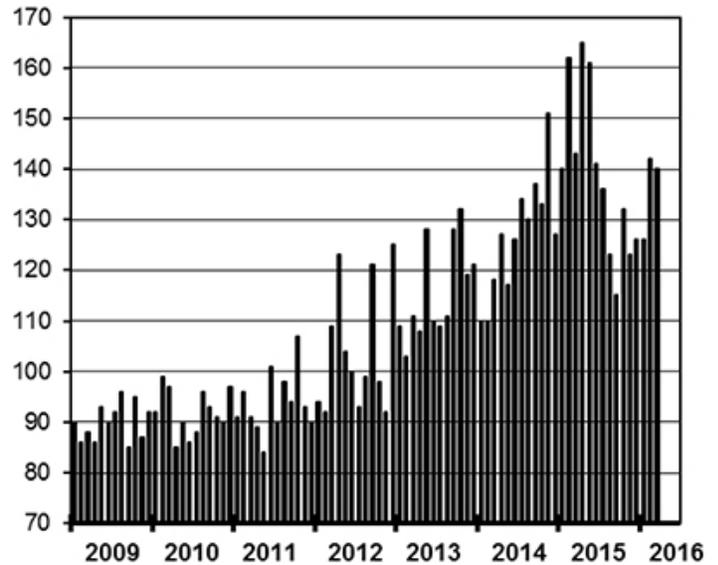


BUSINESS NEWS

MARCH CONSTRUCTION EASES BACK ONE PERCENT. ELECTRIC UTILITIES AND GAS PLANTS RETREAT, NONRESIDENTIAL BUILDING CLIMBS SHARPLY

At a seasonally adjusted annual rate of \$660.5 billion, new construction starts in March receded 1 percent from February's pace, according to Dodge Data & Analytics. Total construction starts had jumped 13 percent in February, led by a huge gain for the electric utility and gas plant category. While the dollar amount of electric utility and gas plant starts fell considerably in March, accompanied by a pullback for public works, the latest month featured a substantial increase for nonresidential building as this sector is providing more evidence that it's regaining upward momentum. In addition, residential building in March registered moderate growth, helped by the continued strength for multifamily housing. During the first three months of 2016, total construction starts on an unadjusted basis were \$141.7 billion, down 10% from the same period a year ago that included the start of several massive power plants and liquefied natural gas export terminals. If the volatile electric utility and gas plant category is excluded, total construction starts on a seasonally adjusted basis in March would be up 4 percent from February, while the year-to-date comparison on an unadjusted basis would show just a modest 4 percent decline.

The March data produced a reading of 140 for the Dodge Index (2000=100), compared to a revised 142 for February. Both February and March came in higher than the sluggish 126 average for the Dodge Index during the previous seven months. "While March construction activity was down slightly from February, it stayed above the lackluster performance witnessed during the second half of last year that continued through January," stated Robert A. Murray, chief economist for Dodge Data & Analytics. "What's noteworthy about the March report is the renewed strength shown by nonresidential building, and in particular its institutional building segment. Nonresidential building had settled



back 5 percent in 2015 after its 24 percent surge in 2014, reflecting not only a steep 36 percent plunge for manufacturing plant construction but also a slight 1 percent decline for institutional building. The strength shown by institutional building in March provides some indication that it's beginning to shift back into expansion mode, helped by growth for educational facilities as well as by the start of several large transportation terminal projects. Assuming this pattern gets repeated over the course of 2016, it would be an important factor behind nonresidential building reestablishing an upward trend."

JAMIE CLAIRE KISER, from page 11

retire after a few years is a much better answer than telling the buyer that you're ready to retire immediately.

4) Tell me about your staff. This is the opportunity to talk about the high quality second-tier of leadership that you have developed and mentored over the last few years (because you've done that, right?). Buyers want to know who they can count on in the short-, medium-, and long-term to keep the business on track. Spending the conversation talking about yourself and starting every sentence with "I did this" and "I did that" raises a red flag, especially if you just told the prospective buyer that you're ready to retire. Focus on the answer to the question from the buyer's perspective – what can you say about your people that will give the buyer confidence in the ability of your firm to continue to perform without you there?

"The key to having a great initial conversation (which leads to great deals and partnerships), is preparation."

I experienced a great example of seller preparation at a recent meeting with a prospective seller. This firm prepared a presentation for me to help me understand who they are, why they are the best, and what sets them apart. The presentation included market sectors, a few award-winning projects that they were proud of (and – I loved this detail – which of their all-star staff worked on the project other than leadership!), and their business model. An additional detail that was new to me in these types of conversations

"That level of preparation answers a lot of questions before they are raised. I left the meeting with a better understanding of this firm's commitment to cutting-edge technology, and confidence that this firm was ready to talk to potential buyers."

was a discussion of all of their major technology and equipment investments over the last few years, from how they financed the purchases, to how they were using those tools to generate revenue. I was blown away. That level of preparation answers a lot of questions before they are raised. I left the meeting with a better understanding of this firm's commitment to cutting-edge technology, and confidence that this firm was ready to talk to potential buyers.

These questions and examples are just a few of the initial items on the list, but they are the ones that seem to occur during every introductory conversation. Remember that the person on the other end of the phone has already looked up your firm; they know what is on the website. The key to having a great initial conversation (which leads to great deals and partnerships), is preparation. They don't know who you are and what makes your firm worth pursuing – so take some time and be ready to tell them! ▀

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