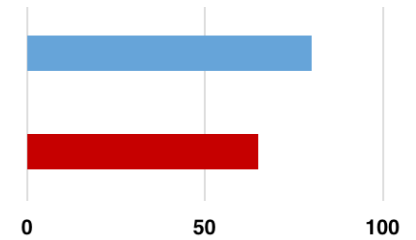


TRENDLINES

Average collection period



The average collection period (ACP), which is the number of days it takes a firm to collect accounts receivable from clients, speaks to the firm's overall quality of AR and the underlying current ratio. **Very high-profit firms** collect their receivables faster than others, with a median ACP of 65 days, compared to a median ACP of 80 days for **average profit firms**, according to the 2015 *Financial Performance Survey*. (Special discount for TZL subscribers: Use code **SPRINGFIN15** to order this survey at 15 percent off on zweiggroup.com.)

Hire for charisma, train for skills

"We have all heard the adage, 'Hire for character and train for skills.' A/E/P firms really need to 'get' this idea. Most don't do it."



Mark Zweig

EDITORIAL

We have all heard the adage, "Hire for character and train for skills." A/E/P firms really need to "get" this idea. Most don't do it. They're focused on PE registrations and degrees and knowledge of specific types of software when in reality most of that stuff can be taught/overcome by the right orientation and training.

Character, however, cannot be taught. If you are dishonest, unethical, mean-spirited, negative, hostile, antagonistic, or too ego-centric you will ultimately fail in spite of degrees and years of experience. But that's not what I want to talk about today. I want to talk about charisma.

I think charisma has a bad name today. Thanks to "Good to Great," so many people believe charismatic leaders are a bad thing – they aren't "Level 5" leaders. I have already written about that. I think it's B.S. A/E firms are not (for the most part), multi-billion dollar, publicly traded enterprises. By and large they are closely held private professional service firms – with the emphasis on "professional." That means you need more than a brand or institution to succeed. You need professionals. Lots of them – lots of good ones – ones who can inspire people and create a following.

Charisma is a big part of that. It is a hard-to-define quality that some people have and some don't. It **IS**, in part, how they look. It is how they carry themselves. How they dress. How they communicate. How they act.

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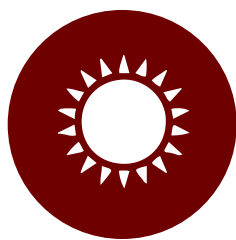
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High energy

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TRANSACTIONS

TWINING, INC. ACQUIRES RADCO, A PROFESSIONAL PLAN REVIEW, INSPECTION, TESTING, PRODUCT EVALUATION AND LISTING COMPANY As the construction industry develops ever more complex and remarkable building systems and infrastructure technologies, **Twining, Inc.** is expanding its capabilities by acquiring **Resources Applications, Designs & Controls, Inc.**, a professional plan review, inspection, product evaluation, testing, and listing company. This transaction will enable Twining, already a leading provider of construction materials testing and inspection services, to provide a broader range of services to the construction industry which fits into Twining's strategy to expand its core service lines into complementary fields. This purchase will enable Twining to provide professional product evaluation, testing, and listing services to clients nationwide.

Founded in 1967, Long Beach, California-based RADCO is a nationally recognized independent third-party testing, listing, and inspection agency for building systems and materials and a nationally recognized the Design Review & Inspection Agency for manufactured and modular homes and buildings.

"Joining the Twining Group of Companies was the right move as we looked to continue the growth and success of RADCO," said Michael Ziemann chairman and CEO of RADCO. "We look forward to expanding our reach within our core competencies and seizing new opportunities made possible through our affiliation with Twining." Ziemann will continue to guide the RADCO team. "Knowing that RADCO and Twining share core values in our commitment to professional expertise, personal relationships with our customers, and integrity in all our dealings with clients and team members helped to make this decision easy."

MARK ZWEIG, from page 1

Here's the difference. The charismatic person walks into a room of strangers and 30 minutes later has a crowd around them – talking, laughing, smiling – and they're forming new relationships, some of which could last a lifetime. The non-charismatic person may join in but no one really notices them or pays any particular attention to what they say or do. And I'm not talking about extroverts versus introverts here. I have seen charismatic introverts in this business. One of the best examples was the late Joe Lalli, FASLA, former CEO of EDSA. He was a charismatic introvert if there ever was one.

These charismatic people don't have to be leaders/managers/owners, either. They can start out as simply professionals, working on projects and interfacing with others. Of course, they will probably grow into leaders because they can – and that's good because we all need more leaders. Our organizations' growth rate is directly related to it.

Are you specifically talking about charisma as a job qualification? Are you looking for people with it? Or are you falling into the same old traps everyone else is? If you want a hunting dog – you'd better pick one that has the qualities needed to be a good one. Make sense? Think about it – and better yet – act on it. ▀

MARK ZWEIG is Zweig Group's founder and CEO. Contact him at mzweig@zweiggroup.com.

RADCO now **TI RADCO, LLP**; doing business as RADCO, a Twining Company; will partner primarily with Applied Engineering and Research, a member of the Twining Group of Companies, to reach a broader spectrum of product developers, agencies, and code compliance regulators, to provide more expansive product evaluation and materials sciences services. Twining's President, Robert Ryan, has led the outreach and negotiations in this transaction.

"We could scarcely be more excited to bring RADCO, Inc., a national leader in product testing and listing, mobility device quality control, plan approval, and many other services into the Twining Group of Companies," said Ryan. "This acquisition will open many new doors for Twining, for Mike Ziemann, and the great people of RADCO. We look forward to many opportunities to work together to demonstrate that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts."

Twining, Inc., based in Long Beach, is the leading provider of construction quality control and engineering services in California. Through its statewide network of offices, Twining provides geotechnical engineering, construction materials testing and special inspection, stormwater management, concrete mix design and evaluation, specialty testing, asphalt pavement quality assurance, asphalt pavement design and materials evaluations, and applied engineering and research services.

TI RADCO, LLP is a nationally recognized independent third-party testing, listing, and inspection agency for building systems and materials in addition to being a nationally recognized Design Review & In-plant Inspection Agency for HUD code manufactured homes and factory built modular structures.

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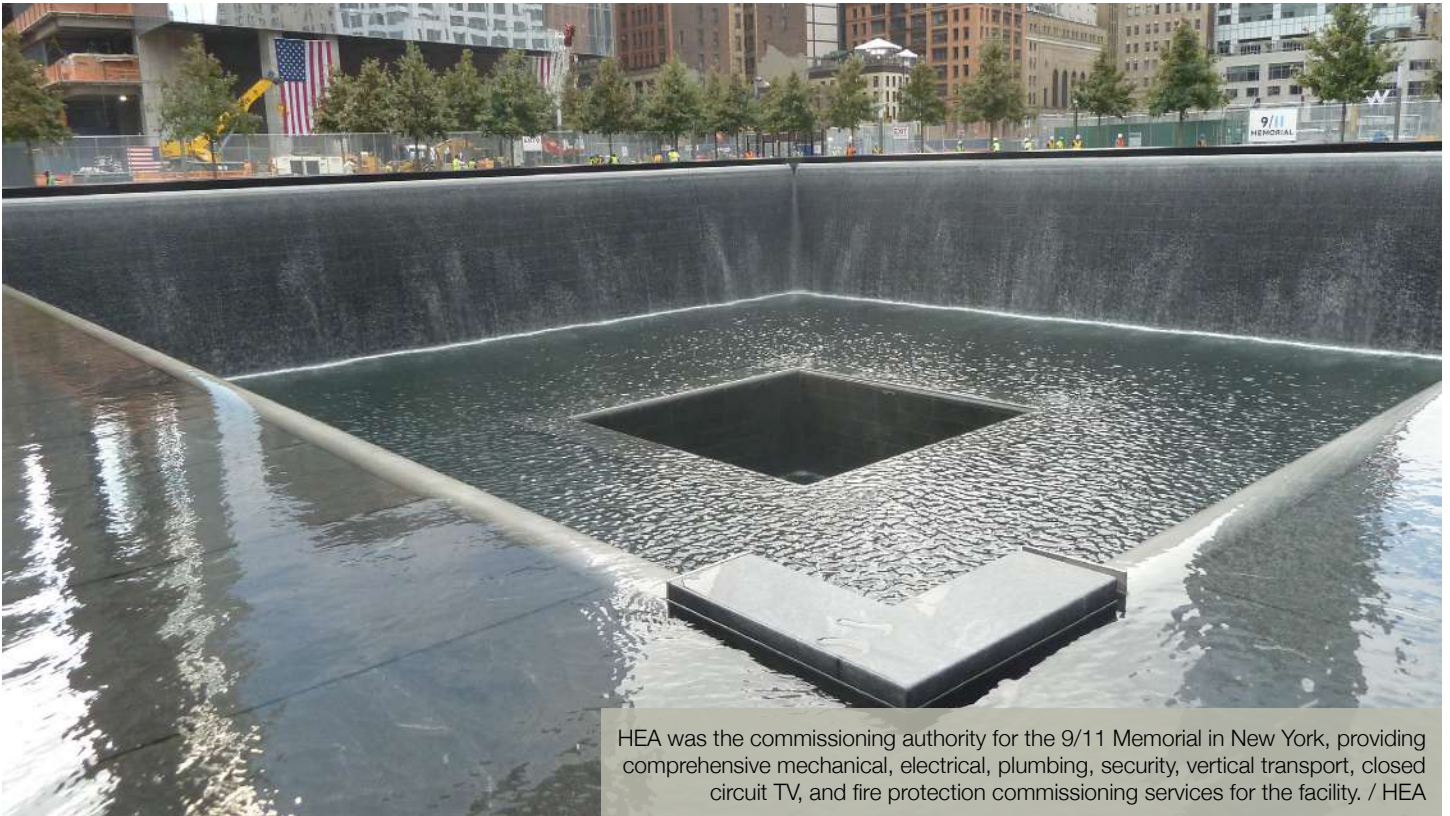
Published continuously since 1992 by Zweig Group, Fayetteville, Arkansas, USA. ISSN 1068-1310.

Issued weekly (48 issues/yr.). \$475 for one-year subscription, \$775 for two-year subscription.

Article reprints: For high-quality reprints, including Eprints and NXTprints, please contact The YGS Group at 717-399-1900, ext. 139, or email TheZweigLetter@TheYGSGroup.com.

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PROFILE



HEA was the commissioning authority for the 9/11 Memorial in New York, providing comprehensive mechanical, electrical, plumbing, security, vertical transport, closed circuit TV, and fire protection commissioning services for the facility. / HEA

High energy

Founder of New York building commissioning firm has found niche, and with a focus on staff and profitability, always has a watchful eye on the next new thing.

By LIISA ANDREASSEN
Correspondent



Michael C. English,
Founder and Senior Partner,
HEA

At the beginning of Michael C. English's career, he was involved with an HVAC start-up company where, over time, more and more contractors and owners asked him to test other pieces of equipment to make sure they were functioning correctly. That's when he decided it was time to venture out on his own. In 1995, he founded **Horizon Engineering Associates, LLP** (New York, NY), an 85-person building commissioning firm, where he is currently a senior partner. HEA's mission is to ensure buildings operate correctly at optimum energy performance.

The firm's expansive portfolio includes signature projects like the New York Tappan Zee bridge replacement, the New York State Supreme Court building, the Mississippi Civil Rights and History Museum, and the College of Human Ecology at Cornell University.

A CONVERSATION WITH ENGLISH.

The Zweig Letter: What are your key strengths?

What do you feel the key strengths are for an effective leader?

Mike English: Being a visionary, a focus on relationship building and analytical skills. To be a good leader, it's very important to be a good listener.

"Effective leaders need to have leadership agility – a big picture understanding combined with the ability to hone in on smaller details with a quick turnaround time when needed."

TZL: How would you describe your leadership style?

ME: It has evolved over the years. When HEA was smaller, I was more of a hands-on leader. As we have grown, I've become more of a leader who

See Q&A, page 4



Q&A, from page 3

helps to guide the direction that the organization is going. Effective leaders need to have leadership agility – a big picture understanding combined with the ability to hone in on smaller details with a quick turnaround time when needed.

“We employ the best people and we stay ahead of the curve. We outperform our competitors by always positioning the firm in a spot where we feel that the next new thing in the construction industry is going to come up.”

TZL: What has been your greatest challenge to date and how did you deal with it?

ME: The recession. We basically took a look at our company and went back to the basics. We focused on hitting our revenue targets, building our backlog of work, and developing staff.

TZL: What is your vision for the future of HEA?

ME: Maintaining our solid reputation as a niche business in the construction industry and managing a healthy and sustainable growth pattern.

TZL: How have you seen the company evolve?

ME: I’ve seen all the ups and downs. HEA has gone from a five-person firm to a 110-person firm, then down to 60, and now at a healthy 85-person firm. Today, we are more focused on profitability where in the beginning we were focused on growth. Moving forward, I believe this shift has created a more solid foundation for the company.

TZL: Tell me about a recent project you are especially proud of and why.

ME: The National September 11 Memorial and Museum, and the Battery Park condominium projects. The Solaire project was used as a first responder location. So, the significance of 9/11 has always had a soft spot for me and the company. In 2002, we were one of the first firms to move back into downtown NYC (the Financial District). Being involved in a project like the Memorial and Museum had a significant impact because of the many lives that were lost and because we were so instantly affected by it.

TZL: How have you helped your firm to outperform some competitors? What do you feel sets you apart?

ME: Without a doubt, it has to do with our people. We employ the best people and we stay ahead of the curve. We outperform our competitors by always positioning the firm in a spot where we feel that the next new thing in the construction industry is going to come up. HEA is also a certified

commissioning firm. This certification demonstrates the highest standards for a professional commissioning firm which makes HEA stand out amongst its competitors.

TZL: Is there any news you care to share about HEA?

ME: We recently celebrated our 20-year anniversary and launched our building enclosure group that will address exterior wall and envelope commissioning. We’re also proud to be working on the largest construction project we have ever been involved in – the new New York Tappan Zee Bridge, a \$4 billion construction project.

TZL: Are you married? Do you have children? Pets?

ME: I am married with three children (Brittany 20, Jessica 17, and Michael 12). We have a Golden Retriever named Duke.

TZL: What’s one thing most people at the firm don’t know about you?

ME: I’m an awesome cook.

TZL: What’s the last book you read?

ME: A hard copy of *American Sniper*.

TZL: What’s the last movie you saw in the theater?

ME: *Batman vs. Superman*.

“Today, we are more focused on profitability where in the beginning we were focused on growth. Moving forward, I believe this shift has created a more solid foundation for the company.”

TZL: What’s the best piece of work-related advice you’ve ever gotten?

ME: Hire slowly, fire quickly.

TZL: Who is a leader you admire? Why?

ME: Abraham Lincoln. He was able to take his ideas and beliefs and institute change across a mass audience despite all the push back.

TZL: When you’re not working, what types of activities do you enjoy?

ME: Watching my kids play sports. Jessica plays lacrosse and Michael plays ice hockey.

TZL: What is your favorite lunch?

ME: Fish tacos. ▀



TALK TO US

Do you have an interesting story to tell? Is your company doing things differently and getting results? Let us know. We’d love to contact you and feature you in an upcoming case study. If interested, please email rmassey@zweiggroup.com.

OPINION



Yellow lights

Sometimes we don't want to slow down, but when we blow through the intersection, we run the risk of getting into a costly collision.



June
Jewell

GUEST SPEAKER

As we drive along the roads each day we make split-second decisions. These decisions can have zero or life changing consequences, or anything in between. A yellow light can occur when driving slow or fast, far from the intersection or right in it. Once in a while we blow through a “risky” yellow light and pray for the best.

Yellow lights occur in your work and business every day. Your employees often make crucial decisions that impact the risk, profitability, and health of your organization without realizing it. This is because we don't like to rock the boat, question our clients when they make a request, or even follow instructions that just don't seem right. Very often it seems much easier to ignore these questionable situations – we don't have time, we don't want to appear untrusting. But we all know that a yellow light can turn red at any moment.

Yellow lights in business come in many forms but all have something in common – they all have potential consequences that are unknown. Stopping at yellow lights may seem very inconvenient, even risky – what if we offend our client by questioning their decision?

Here is a typical example of a situation that happens every day in business, yet most professionals, and especially untrained sellers, will ignore until it is too late:

“Yellow lights in business come in many forms but all have something in common – they all have potential consequences that are unknown.”

Preliminary conversations with a prospective client regarding a project they are hoping to win and start in the next three months are going really well. Your team is getting very excited and already tasting the fruits of a big win. This project is a real game changer for the firm, and would add more than \$1 million in revenue over the next two years. You can feel the momentum building, and the client is about to make a decision to select your firm. In passing, they jokingly mention they wanted to start the project a year ago but couldn't get the funding. You smile and ignore the statement – this is too good to be true – and it is. How lucky to be here at the right time when they

See JUNE JEWELL, page 8



SP@TLIGHT ON: Ver

PROFILE



Aerial view of 366 AllEarth Solar Trackers at the 2.2 megawatt Claire Solar Farm in South Burlington, VT.

Riding the ‘Solarcoaster’

Engineer-turned-entrepreneur David Blittersdorf is thriving in Vermont, where the market in renewable energy has a long-term horizon.

By RICHARD MASSEY
Managing Editor



David Blittersdorf,
Founder and
CEO,
AllEarth
Renewables

When the most recent *U.S. Clean Tech Leadership Index* came out this spring, a host of familiar states appeared in the Top 10 – California, Massachusetts, Oregon, and New York.

Several things happened in the last few years to create an enticing market for renewable energy in Vermont.

But little Vermont, just the 49th largest state in the country, appeared at No. 3 on the index, which measures clean technology, policy, and capital. The seventh annual index, created by San Francisco-based Clean Edge Inc., touted, among other things, Vermont’s big gains in wind and solar power, its number of charging stations for electric vehicles, and its progressive state-level legislation.

“Vermont is the big story of the Top 10,” the index says.

While the news is certainly good, it’s not surprising to someone like mechanical engineer and entrepreneur David Blittersdorf, a Vermont native who built his first turbine when he was just 14 years old. The founder and CEO of **AllEarth Renewables, Inc.**, a producer of the Solar Tracker, a panel that follows the sun throughout the day, says several things happened in the last few years to create an enticing market for renewable energy in Vermont.

A Comprehensive Energy Plan, a Renewable Portfolio Standard, and net metering created the perfect climate for innovators like himself. It also helped that in 2014, the Vermont Yankee Nuclear Power Plant, at the time the state’s largest producer of electricity, closed down, leaving an energy void that had to be filled.

“Those things came together to create quite a market in renewables,” Blittersdorf says.

Blittersdorf’s company has fared well, growing to





about 40 people with an annual revenue of about \$20 million. In 2012, AllEarth even made *Inc.* magazine's 500 | 5000 list of the nation's fastest growing private companies. While times have been good, due to the nature of the business, Blittersdorf's company is subject to the ups and downs of policy, pricing, permitting, regulations, and incentives. As a result, the revenue stream is not linear.

"You learn by putting a lot of new things in. That's the engineer in me, developing and introducing new products."

"I call our growth the Solarcoaster," he says.

While the company is based in Vermont, AllEarth is active across the country in areas where it makes sense to do business. Headline projects in the Green Mountain State include the 10MW Georgia Mountain Community Wind Farm, built by another one of Blittersdorf's companies, **Georgia Mountain Community Wind LLC**, and two utility-scale solar farms.

AllEarth Renewables is essentially an R&D company that's in a constant process of innovation to keep pace with market expectations. Trial and error, and ultimately, success.

"You learn by putting a lot of new things in," Blittersdorf says. "That's the engineer in me, developing and introducing new products."

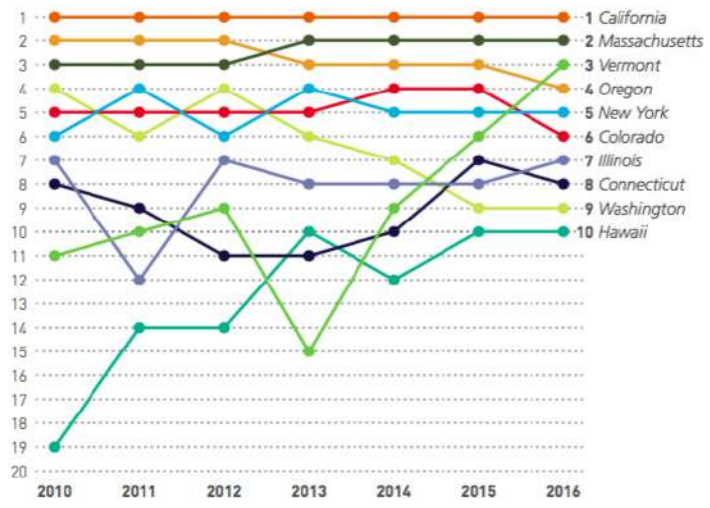
Predictably, Vermont's hospitable climate for renewable energy has attracted large national companies like **SolarCity**, **NRG Energy**, and **Iberdrola Renewables**, to invest in Vermont. The upturn has also triggered the creation of homegrown companies.

"You have a lot of people paying attention because the market is right," Blittersdorf says.

"It took that block of power off the market and created demand from other areas. It was a positive event. It [the nuclear power plant] represented the old way of providing utilities."

The *Clean Tech Index*, which also measures the Top 50 metro areas, praises Vermont across a broad range of indicators, including innovation – three clean energy patents issued in 2015 – LEED building deployment, and governmental policy. While California is the clear cut No. 1, and though its absolute numbers dwarf Vermont's, when measured by parts-per-million people, as many of the benchmarks are, Vermont emerges as a national leader.

2016 TOP 10 STATES (INCLUDING HISTORICAL RANKINGS)



Source: U.S. Clean Tech Leadership Index, Clean Edge, Inc.

Vermont has climbed to No. 3 on the Clean Tech Leadership Index due to a variety of factors, among them a jump in wind and solar power, and the number of electric vehicles and charging stations.

Report co-author Clint Wilder, noting that Vermont ranked 15th in the index just three years ago, says he wouldn't be surprised if Vermont keeps climbing the ladder.

"I call our growth the Solarcoaster."

"I'm sure they have their eyes on No. 1 or No. 2," Wilder says. "Why wouldn't they if they have come this far?"

Though the roots of the state's clean energy movement may have started beforehand, the convenient beginning date is 2011, when the state issued its Comprehensive Energy Plan calling for 90 percent renewable energy by 2050. Four years later, in 2015, Vermont passed legislation creating a 75 percent Renewable Portfolio Standard, or RPS, for electricity generation, by 2032.

Vermont also has what's called net metering – small power producers like homeowners and businesses set up their own solar panels and sell what power they don't use back to their utility for credits.

But the closure of the Vermont Yankee Nuclear Power Plant, commissioned in 1972, is perhaps the most important occurrence in Vermont's embrace of the largescale, widespread use of renewables.

"It took that block of power off the market and created demand from other areas," Blittersdorf says. "It was a positive event. It [the nuclear power plant] represented the old way of providing utilities."

See VERMONT, page 8

JUNE JEWELL, from page 5

are finally ready to move forward. Several months into the project you start to get concerned that the client has not paid any of their invoices. Weeks later after the client goes radio silent and won't return your phone calls, you find out he still has no money and the project isn't going to continue. At that point you really wish you had asked more questions and you are \$40,000 in the hole.

“Yellow lights can be quick one-off statements, word-of-mouth information, or even intuition when talking with others that just doesn't feel right.”

Yellow lights can be quick one-off statements, word-of-mouth information, or even intuition when talking with others that just doesn't feel right. Something inside you says – should I say something? Should I ask a question? But very often the fear takes over – the fear of losing a client, getting embarrassed, or even worse – of derailing a good relationship.

These yellow lights occur every day but often we choose to look the other way. Sometimes the yellow lights are a blessing – they are warnings being sent to warn you of possible danger ahead. If you just take the time to stop, and turn the yellow light to red or green, you will not only deter possible future risk, but you will show your client, boss, or employee (wife, kids, parents) that you want the best possible future outcome.

“Take the time to slow down, turn the light to green and proceed with the certainty that you may help your firm avoid a big crash someday.”

So how do you stop and turn a yellow light to red or green? The process is actually easier than it seems. In some cases it is as simple as asking questions. You can preface your questions with a statement that lets the individual know that you are concerned. For example:

“Mr. Prospect, I know how important this project is to you and you have already had considerable delays in the past with funding. What has changed since last year with the funding situation and how can we be confident that this project will be fully funded?”

VERMONT, from page 7

Clean energy, of course, is not without its controversies. Highly visible, solar farms, and in particular, wind farms, arouse opposition from individuals and groups that lament the loss of pristine views, and who say the quality of life is compromised for those living near the installations. In Vermont, that opposition has in part manifested itself in the form of a grinding, rigorous permitting process, particularly for wind farms.

While Blittersdorf is well aware of the concerns

This may seem like a radical approach but what are the downsides to asking this? If the client has money he or she will happily answer and the yellow light will turn green – you can proceed with confidence. If they don't have the money then you were never going to get it anyway.

Another scenario that often occurs is when a client asks for something outside the scope and you know it will cause them to exceed their budget. Very often our staff, including project managers, will move forward and give the client what they want, hoping they will get paid if they bill it.

A more effective approach might be to ask the client how they want to proceed and let them make the decision. For example:

“Mr. Client, this is a great idea and will really add value to the project, however, it will cost more money to do it that way. Let me go back and figure out how much extra this will be and then you can decide if it makes sense to move forward with this change.”

“Very often the fear takes over – the fear of losing a client, getting embarrassed, or even worse – of derailing a good relationship.”

If your employees' desire is to keep your client happy, maintain the relationship and avoid conflict, it is often easier to kick the can and deal with a tough situation later. This often results in missed expectations, increased liability, schedule delays, and budget overruns.

One way to work on this with your team is role playing. I often get a group of project managers together and have them take turns playing the client and the consultant. For some funny reason they love playing the client! This type of role playing can give them the words they need to be successful in difficult situations, and build their confidence so that they can see this type of slowing down process as a benefit rather than torture.

Next time you have that uncomfortable feeling about something that is said, you will know that it is a gift, and even a possible opportunity. Take the time to slow down, turn the light to green, and proceed with the certainty that you may help your firm avoid a big crash someday. ▀

JUNE JEWELL is the president of AEC Business Solutions. Connect with her on LinkedIn and learn more about how to improve your firm's financial performance at aecbusiness.com.

“After all these years in the industry, there's a huge transition happening. The future is not tied to fossil fuels.”

surrounding renewable energy, he also knows that the tide has already turned, especially in a place like Vermont.

“After all these years in the industry, there's a huge transition happening,” Blittersdorf says. “The future is not tied to fossil fuels.” ▀

OPINION



The drive for diversification

Once a firm has a strong identity, it can branch out into multiple markets, an essential if a firm wants to stay productive during economic downturns and seasonal lulls.



**Paul
Greenhagen**

**FIRM
FOUNDATION**

We can learn a lot from patterns. From project teams to leadership, patterns help us gather data, solve problems, forecast revenues, and gauge success. In the AEC industry, the markets that we serve have a distinct pattern as well. While one segment is booming, another is down. Then, when that thriving market starts a downturn (and it always does), another will start its upswing. Though we can never fully predict the timing of the markets, the trend lines show a decades-long pattern that provides a clue to managing the fluctuations. And, if done right, diversification is one way to survive. So far, it has boded well for **Westwood Professional Services** (Hot Firm #9 and Best Firm Multidiscipline #32 for 2015).

Westwood is Minnesota-born, established in 1972 as an engineering firm serving private land development. Back in the day, serving a single industry from one location, we, like many firms, survived market variations by making tough staffing decisions and spending cuts. Add a long, cold Minnesota winter to a market slowdown and work reduced even more. Our business is dependent on many things that are out of our control, so diversification can bring more stability and less sleepless nights for those of us leading the charge.

Diversification has helped Westwood to become a

scalable and agile firm, better equipped to manage the ups and downs within the markets we serve. The strategy we use can be stated simply: We focus on applying what we do best in markets and geographic locations that align with our vision and create balance in our business.

■ **We look for markets that trend opposite to the other market(s) we serve.** Researching and comparing forecasts and historic market data across segments, we can find opportunities in the opposing trend lines. Market segments that show promise

See PAUL GREENHAGEN, page 10



BUSINESS NEWS

UCLA PROFESSOR OF MECHANICAL AND AEROSPACE ENGINEERING GUNNED DOWN BY FORMER STUDENT The gunman who killed a UCLA professor before committing suicide on campus Wednesday [June 1] left behind a “kill list” and is suspected in the shooting death of a woman in Minnesota, authorities said.

Mainak Sarkar, 38, a former doctoral student and Minnesota resident, left a list at his home in that state that included the names of the woman, UCLA professor William S. Klug and a second professor who is safe, LAPD Chief

Charlie Beck said Thursday [June 2]. Sarkar shot Klug multiple times in a small office in UCLA Engineering Building 4 before taking his own life, authorities said.

Sarkar had accused Klug of stealing his computer code and giving it to someone else, according to police.

Authorities declined to name the woman in Minnesota or a possible motive.

On Thursday [June 2], police in Brooklyn Park, Minnesota, strung crime scene tape around

a gray split-level home at 2457 Pearson Parkway. Public records listed the resident there as Ashley Hasti.

When detectives arrived at Klug’s office on Wednesday [June 1] morning and found both bodies, they also found a note from Sarkar listing his home address in Minnesota and asking someone to “check on my cat.”

“Immediately we were highly suspicious,” Beck told *The Times*. “That made me uneasy about what we would find when we got to Minnesota.” — *Los Angeles Times*

PAUL GREENHAGEN, from page 9

and, most importantly, fit our business model, may be worth a deeper look; especially if the market is one that fills a void. Back in 2006, when residential and commercial development began its decline, wind energy really took off. Westwood entered wind energy back in 1997, so we were well positioned to benefit from wind’s upward swing. Diversification into wind and other markets were key to surviving the decrease in land development during this extended period.

■ **We focus on steady workload throughout the year.**

Westwood was born in a climate where cold weather could greatly impact workload. By diversifying into new geographic markets, our growing national clientele presents project opportunities year round. Now, when it is 20 below zero in Minnesota and construction comes to a halt, steady workload can be found on projects around the country. National expansion has also attracted top talent to our team, which is the root of Westwood’s success; better people, better results.

“Westwood continues to diversify with expansion into regions that are aligned with our markets and services and enables us to provide a more stable working environment for our staff.”

■ **We strive for a diverse skill-set in our staff.** A diverse skill-set enables scalability. When work slows, we can keep our people busy if they can easily shift from one market to another. Many of our surveyors, engineers, and other professional staff have been trained and are experienced working in multiple markets that we serve. We invest in, and prepare staff for, economic downturns by providing opportunities for cross-training. As a result, our people are highly skilled, can easily transition, and feel more secure. As for Westwood, we retain more staff, enhance our workplace, and deliver better results.

Having shared this insight, I should note that we first made sure we had a foundation to build on before implementing our diversification strategy. Without strategic alignment of our staff, a clear corporate vision, and a solid understanding of why we are in business in the first place, we would not have been successful. Westwood first established much needed boundaries, guiding principles, and clear strategies that help keep us focused

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and better able to make sound business decisions. One critical requirement for any diversification opportunity is that it strengthens the foundation we built. To meet that requirement, we:

■ **Stick to what we do best.** This means surveying and engineering, our core services. Though we are multi-disciplined, our specialty services complement our core services. Aerial mapping and LiDAR, GIS mapping, electrical engineering, transportation and traffic, and water resources are surveying and engineering specialties that expand our capabilities and add significant value to our projects. Specialty services like land planning or environmental services increase our opportunities to bring in new clients and additional surveying and engineering services.

■ **Serve only those who we can provide the most value.** The markets we enter are those that need what we do best. It seems like a no-brainer, however, when market opportunities run low and companies get into survival mode, it is easy to be reactive, chase shiny objects, and get into markets where we don’t really belong. We’ve learned this from experience and know that the investment of time and money often exceeds the return.

“We focus on our greatest opportunity to best serve our clients, while developing our people and growing our business.”

Westwood continues to diversify with expansion into regions that are aligned with our markets and services and enables us to provide a more stable working environment for our staff. We focus on our greatest opportunity to best serve our clients, while developing our people and growing our business. ▀

PAUL GREENHAGEN is president and CEO of Westwood Professional Services. Contact him at paul.greenhagen@westwoodps.com.

OPINION



Developing an open culture

If trust is the foundation of success, then it's imperative that firm leaders establish transparency, and ensure that staff is engaged and informed.



**Stephen
Lucy**

BEST PRACTICES

According to Deloitte's 2015 *Global Human Capital Trends* report, 87 percent of companies view engagement and culture as two of their greatest challenges. The companies that successfully create a culture defined by meaningful work, deep employee engagement, and transparency, beat out the competition in the race to find talent.

This finding is further confirmed in Deloitte's 2016 *Global Human Capital Trends* report, in which the impact of culture on an organization's success dominated the more than 7,000 companies that responded. As many as 82 percent of the respondents believed that culture provides a potential competitive advantage.

Employee engagement and culture are business topics that have become priorities for every successful organization, and as such, can no longer be relegated solely to the human resources department. And the foundation of this open culture, trust, must start with a firm's leadership.

DEFINE YOUR CULTURE. Before you can have an open culture, you must define what it means to you and

your firm. There are many dimensions to developing an open, trusting culture – transparency of operations and information, an emphasis on building collaborative teams, a deliberate decision to tear down office silos, and even the physical office environment. At the heart of this culture, however, are the mission and values that you and your leadership define as important to the success of your firm.

These values are the guiding light and must become embedded within the processes, rewards, and behaviors you establish as a leader. The end goal of developing an open culture is trust – a trust that prevails through the life cycle of every

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ON THE MOVE

PPG ANNOUNCES EXECUTIVE APPOINTMENTS

PPG announced that **Vince Morales** and **John Jankowski** were appointed to new positions. Both appointments went into effect June 1.

Morales, currently vice president, investor relations, and treasurer, will have continued responsibility for investor relations and assumes additional responsibilities as vice

president, finance.

Jankowski, who joined PPG in 2013 in his current position of assistant treasurer, is appointed vice president and treasurer.

Morales joined PPG in 1985 and held a variety of finance leadership roles of increasing responsibility including manager, sales/exchange accounting; director, managerial/

financial accounting; and vice president, investor relations.

Jankowski began his career in 1990 at Bethlehem Steel Corp. as an engineer and then a production manager. In 1995, Jankowski joined H.J. Heinz Co., where he worked for 18 years and advanced through finance leadership roles.

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business, a trust that permeates and is shown through deep relationships with your peers, employees, and clients.

“The end goal of developing an open culture is trust – a trust that prevails through the life cycle of every business, a trust that permeates and is shown through deep relationships with your peers, employees, and clients.”

COMMUNICATION IS KEY. As in almost all aspects of our business, the way we communicate to others has a direct bearing on how successful we are in fulfilling our goals. Although texting and emails are expedient ways to deliver information or get answers from others, it is not the best means to convey that you want to engage and be open with your staff, especially when it comes to the establishment of a firm’s culture.

Is your staff going to trust and want to follow the person who looks them in the eye and delivers the message, or an anonymous email which could have been composed by another and just sent out under your name? The power of personal communication cannot be overstated. I understand that logistically some firms have no choice but to convey information by mass means, but for the majority of our industry, there is no excuse for failing to communicate in person. Absent an interactive dialogue, you have already proven you have an open culture in name only.

REIMAGINING THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT. The open concept office environment is not new, but it certainly has evolved. While some consider it just an economic benefit to avoid constructing as many physical walls, the real benefit should lie in the removal of those unseen walls which hinder interaction between teams or create silos between services.

If properly designed and implemented, an open office creates greater collaboration and conversation among employees. Productivity improvements occur not just because of this visible, new level of accountability, but because now you can more easily engage others around you and share ideas. The physical space sends a special message to staff, clients and peers about how you operate. You have democratized everyone’s experience and leveled the playing field by simply eliminating walls.

CREATING A “CLASSLESS” SOCIETY. I am far from a bleeding heart, but I do believe that extreme hierarchies at work alienate, instead of encourage, inclusion. There have to be leaders, but you must be able to relate to those you lead which includes leading by example. For that reason, you must be conscious of the image that you project within the office and be watchful for both subtle and overt signs that you consider yourself better or above your staff.

How often have we seen a leader drop work on someone else’s deck and then head home at 5 p.m.? I would like to think never, but I know I was the recipient of that treatment early in my career and it sticks with me to this day. As we advance in our careers, there will always be added rewards and benefits, but we need to remember where we came from and how leaders both motivated and infuriated us. Do not repeat the sins of your forbearers.

HOW MUCH DOES ANYONE NEED TO KNOW? Creating an open culture does not mean that all firm information is available to all staff. We all have fiduciary duties which may require confidentiality. Also, ownership comes with risks which may make sense to a partner, but may send other staff running for the doors. However, by sharing as much information as possible regarding firm operations, you will create a higher degree of “ownership” in the firm by all staff.

“We must also remember that in the absence of information, staff will create their own storyline about the current and future health of the firm.”

Some shared information, such as contract scope, should be obvious. Other information, including backlog and contract pursuits, can provide assurances to staff of future work and better define the strategic goals of the firm. Specific job costs not only reflect on management of work, but also better informs on how to cost future work.

We must also remember that in the absence of information, staff will create their own storyline about the current and future health of the firm, and that invariably some will want to create a horror story instead of one with a happy ending. ▀

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