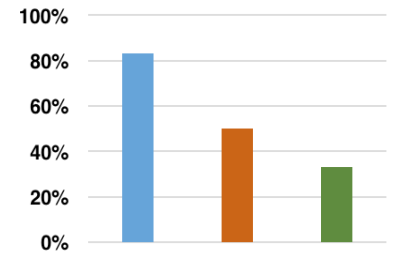


TRENDLINES

Business development bonuses



Most firms (83 percent) give bonuses to business development representatives based on **sales/business development**, but 50 percent of firms give bonuses based on **company profitability**, and 33 percent award bonuses for **number of new clients and for office profitability**. Totals sum to more than 100 percent because more than one answer choice could be selected. (Special discount to TZL subscribers: Use code **SPRINGMKT15** to order this survey at 15 percent off on ZweigGroup.com.)

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Becoming a better business developer

“You have to target your clients, figure out who in those organizations could hire you or influence the decision to hire you, and then learn all you can about those people.”



Mark Zweig

EDITORIAL

Your ability to sell work is probably the most crucial skill you can have **IF** you really want to maximize your opportunities in the AEC world we all live in. Here are a few pointers that may help increase your effectiveness:

- 1) Know who you are trying to sell to.** This is step one. You have to target your clients, figure out who in those organizations could hire you or influence the decision to hire you, and then learn all you can about those people. The goal is to look smart when you finally get in front of them.
- 2) Be helpful!** No one really wants to be sold to. But who doesn't like to be helped? If you want to be a more effective seller all you really need to do is be more helpful to the right people. Those who have problems you can solve that don't take everything you have to fix them. Free advice, input, a quick look at a problem – a referral to someone else or some research – these things will endear you to your clients and help you sell more work as a result.
- 3) Make friends first.** Stop trying so hard to sell people stuff and instead make friends. Once you do, the trust level will go up and selling will simply happen on its own as friends help each other. Make friends by showing real interest in the other person and looking for common interests/conditions that you can bond over. And of course, just be nice.
- 4) Undersell.** Don't B.S. your way to making a sale. Just be honest and truthful and create expectations no greater than what you are sure you can meet. Creating expectations you can't meet is easy to do but hard to overcome if

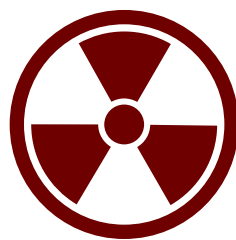
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Going nuclear? Yes and no

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BUSINESS NEWS

BALFOUR BEATTY COMMUNITIES FOUNDATION AWARDS 50 COLLEGE SCHOLARSHIPS FOR 2016/2017 ACADEMIC YEAR Balfour Beatty announced that it has awarded 50 college scholarships for the 2016/2017 academic year to residents of properties owned and managed by Balfour Beatty Communities. Scholarship recipients were selected on the basis of demonstrated leadership qualities and a drive toward bettering their community.

"This year, we received a record-breaking number of applications after a new approach to scholarship eligibility was adopted – widening the applicant pool to include military service members and their dependents, including spouses, as well as multifamily and student housing residents," said Chris Williams, president of Balfour Beatty Communities Foundation. "The academic and community-driven integrity of our resident applicants is consistently impressive and we are proud to help support their academic journey and future aspirations."

As part of the foundation's goal to promote the pursuit of education and a commitment to community leadership, Balfour Beatty Communities Foundation awards academic

scholarships to high school seniors, undergraduate and/or graduate students.

JACOBS WINS CONTRACT FOR TCI SANMAR PVC-2 EXPANSION PROJECT IN EGYPT Jacobs Engineering Group Inc. announced it received a contract to provide detailed engineering and procurement assistance services to TCI Sanmar Chemical S.A.E. for its PVC-2 polyvinyl chloride plant expansion project in Port Said, Egypt.

When complete, the PVC-2 facility's production capacity is expected to be 200 kilo-tonnes per annum. Combined with its other global facilities, this takes TCI Sanmar's total PVC production capacity to 400 KTPA, strengthening the company's position as one of the largest PVC producers in the Middle East and North Africa.

The project's schedule includes 18 months of engineering and 21 months for mechanical completion.

In making the announcement, Jacobs Senior Vice President Vinayak Pai stated, "We are delighted to continue our relationship with TCI Sanmar. I'm confident our global experience in the industry combined with our strong local knowledge can contribute significant value to this strategically important facility."

MARK ZWEIG, from page 1

you are successful in making the initial sale. People will be angry and disappointed, and there probably won't be a second sale if you oversell.

- 5) **Be experimental.** There's just not enough willingness in this business to take chances when it comes to selling. I don't know if it's because people in this business are conservative and introverted, or if it's that every project tends to have a lot of people involved and the group-think process takes over. But the fact is there's too little creativity and humor in most of the sales pitches/presentations I see. In fact, the stuff is so boring it puts me to sleep. I can't sit there while one presentation is being made, much less multiple ones as a typical client would have to sit through. Why is this OK? How did this become a good way to do things?
- 6) **Be flexible.** When you're selling, you have to be sensitive to the cues of the people you're selling to. Are they nodding in agreement? Or are they secretly disagreeing with everything you're saying? Watch facial expressions, body language, and listen carefully to their questions and comments. You have to be prepared to make a shift – emphasize a different benefit – move off the topic – to change things up. This is really important!
- 7) **Be positive.** Positive people believe they can overcome difficulties and succeed. People like being around other people who are positive. This expectation is often transmitted to the client you are trying to sell services to. Negative people see why things won't work right away. No one likes that.
- 8) **Work at it!** Make a lot of contacts. Pick up your phone. Go see people. Selling is all about the possibilities you'll create through a lot of activity. Want five times as many potential projects as you have now? Rev up the calls/meetings fivefold over what you are already doing and good things will come from it. Nothing will happen if you just wish to sell more but don't do anything.
- 9) **Once you succeed, train other people.** Take them with you. Show them how it's done. Demonstrate your approach. Help others overcome their reluctance to selling and you'll improve your own skills in the process.
- 10) **Repeat!** Keep doing what works. And if it stops working, try something else. You have to keep going, keep working at it, and improving your methods to become more and more effective. There really isn't any limit to what you can achieve unless you stop. ▀

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

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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



Mechanical engineer Michael Burgess, Xpera Group, 1959-2016

A tribute to an industry pro

A passionate and prolific engineer, a skilled expert in disputes, and beloved by those he worked with and for, Michael Burgess will be missed.

By LIISA ANDREASSEN
Correspondent

San Diego-based **Xpera Group** (#77 Hot Firm for 2015), a construction consulting company, recently mourned the loss of Michael Burgess, the lovable and prolific engineer who had fought, and ultimately lost, a courageous battle against cancer. He was 56.

Burgess majored in mechanical engineering at Cal Poly-San Luis Obispo. Prior to joining Xpera, he held positions at Natkin Company in Indiana, University Mechanical in Arizona and California, Western Air in California, and for 20 years as an employee and owner with **Burgess Group Inc.**, a firm founded by his father, Milton.

Known for his infectious passion, Burgess served as the dedicated expert in 200 cases, and was experienced in construction management, LEED building commissioning, forensic engineering, and design.

“Mike was not just a colleague, but someone I had

“Mike was not just a colleague, but someone I had known for 18 years. Mike won’t ever be replaced. In fact, it would likely take two or three professionals to even come close to meeting his output.”

known for 18 years,” says Xpera president Ted Bumgardner. “Mike won’t ever be replaced. In fact, it would likely take two or three professionals to even come close to meeting his output.”

Mike’s practice largely fell into two distinct categories: engineering/design, with Burgess Group, and new/active projects with Xpera; and forensic engineering associated with existing projects for the purpose of resolving challenges and conflicts.

He first joined Xpera in 2011 as vice president. At

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TRIBUTE, from page 3

the time, the entire AEC industry was still very much immersed in the Great Recession.

“While not a lot of new construction was happening at the time, there was still plenty of litigation from the boom times that required the substantial expertise that someone like Mike possessed,” Bumgardner says.

As the economy turned around and projects started moving forward once again, there was a huge need in the industry for proactive risk management – especially helping project teams understand new building codes and other regulations.

“Mike’s thought leadership, combined with the incredible hindsight afforded through participation as a designated expert on more than 200 disputes, proved invaluable to our clients.”

“Mike’s thought leadership, combined with the incredible hindsight afforded through participation as a designated expert on more than 200 disputes, proved invaluable to our clients,” Bumgardner says. “By combining energy efficiency and sustainability consulting with practical risk management, Mike’s practice was definitely in growth mode as his illness took hold.”

COLLEAGUES AND CLIENTS SHARE MEMORIES. Burgess worked with attorney Ann Rankin on the team representing the plaintiff on the landmark case of Beacon Residential Community Association vs. Catellus Third and King, et. al., which they took over in 2011. The biggest challenge in the case, which would end up changing California law and the standard of care for design professionals, was the existence of solar heat gain that caused some units to experience elevated temperatures as much as 30 degrees higher than the outside air. Previous legal teams had engaged a number of mechanical engineering firms, none of which could suggest a solution.

“When we brought on Mike, he established a team that included electrical engineers, mechanical engineers, structural engineers, cost estimators and more.

“They quickly analyzed the problem and found a solution,” Rankin says. “Mike was always passionate about his work, and could explain complicated technical concepts to lay people in an interesting and understandable way. Although he had been a mechanical engineer for over 30 years, he was still very excited about the field and about solving real problems for real people.”

“Excitement,” “enthusiasm” and “passion” are words that came up repeatedly when talking about Burgess and his work.

Steve Amundson of the law offices of White Amundson Kish & Sweeney worked with Burgess for more than 10 years on a number of cases involving cast iron pipes.

“We worked together on issues with a very narrow focus,”

Amundson says. “Mike conveyed an interest, even an excitement, in these cast iron pipes that had to be genuine. You can’t fake that. He loved what he did and he demonstrated that. I really enjoyed working with him every day I had the opportunity.”

Burgess’ passion for the industry was contagious and he put it to good use through his involvement with ASHRAE, the trade association focused on building systems, energy efficiency, indoor air quality, refrigeration and sustainability. For more than 20 years, he served in a variety of roles within the organization, including its board of directors and various councils and committees.

Mark Bender of **Bender Dean Engineering** says, “Mike convinced me to become more involved in ASHRAE. He was good at getting people to volunteer. Really, Mike just loved ASHRAE, helping our local chapter and being involved.”

“Mike’s energy and smile was contagious within ASHRAE,” added Karine Leblanc, the organization’s director and regional chair. Bay Area attorney Tyler Berding worked with Michael on a number of client projects over the years, including one that he described as their most difficult, which was resolved earlier this year.

“He was creative, inventive and very easy to work with,” Berding says. “He was a fine expert and a wonderful colleague. Everyone at Berding & Weil will miss him.”

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT? Xpera is looking for additional experts and thought leaders to move forward with the tremendous momentum that Burgess had established through his prolific output as an engineer.

“Mike was clearly a well-loved individual whose outsized personality, love of life, and sheer brilliance left an indelible mark on all those that knew him. His memorial service was so packed, they were running out of chairs to fit everyone.”

“Mike was clearly a well-loved individual whose outsized personality, love of life and sheer brilliance left an indelible mark on all those that knew him. His memorial service was so packed, they were running out of chairs to fit everyone,” Bumgardner says. “We can rest assured that any issues that God has with plumbing and HVAC in heaven will soon be resolved.

“Seeing the impact that Michael had on so many people, it makes us realize how special and important business relationships are to each of us personally. It’s what makes what we do worth doing. We are all very fortunate indeed when we can do what we love to do for people we love doing it for.” ▀



Lessons from Lucinda

What did I learn about running an A/E/P firm from a 62-year old former British equestrian Olympian? Quite a lot, as it turns out.



**Christina
Zweig**

MARKETING MATTERS

I recently had the opportunity to ride in a two-day clinic with Lucinda Green, a British equestrian and journalist who competes in eventing. She is most well-known for winning the Badminton Horse Trials a record six times, on six different horses, and she also took home team silver at the 1984 Olympic Games in Los Angeles.

Just like in business, in horseback riding you are never done learning. I try to keep myself educated through reading, watching others ride, and occasional visits to my coach. When I heard that Lucinda Green, the star of one of my favorite computer games from my youth, an Olympian, and one of the best jumping instructors in the world, was coming to a friend's farm in Starkville, Mississippi, I couldn't pass up the opportunity to ride with her.

Lucinda Green did not disappoint. Like any good coach she was tough and clear about areas that needed improvement, but also encouraging of each rider's individual strengths. Her unique and clearly defined philosophies about riding left me with a lot to think about in my riding, and had some clear parallels to running a successful business.

In cross country, one phase of the sport of eventing has a rider galloping at speed over 20 or so solid obstacles. Penalties are incurred for stops or fly-bys, for circling, and for going over an optimum time.

Your A/E firm is like your horse – it weighs a lot more than you do, it has a mind of its own, and it's responsible for carrying you through a variety of situations. You can hold the reins and try to dictate every single step, but sooner or later your horse will falter or you will encounter some unexpected terrain. No matter how tightly you hold or how strong your arms are, you will never be able to control every movement of your horse. In fact, the act of trying will only set you up for disaster. The last thing you want is a power struggle with a 1,000-pound animal on your way

See CHRISTINA ZWIG, page 8



SPOTLIGHT ON: Nuclear

PROFILE



Dry cask storage of spent fuel at Vermont Yankee nuclear power plant. / Entergy

Going nuclear? Yes and no

Plant closures and small modular reactors are expected to define the nuclear landscape for the foreseeable future – and provide opportunities for enterprising engineers.



Rod McCullum, Nuclear Engineer, Nuclear Energy Institute

By RICHARD MASSEY
Managing Editor

Though the future of U.S. nuclear power is uncertain, there is a future. The recent spate of announced closures for plants across the country, and the marathon decommissionings that will ensue, has been accompanied by news that other reactors have been permitted for construction.

Also, experts say, the role of innovation and entrepreneurship should play a role in keeping nuclear on the agenda, even as it continues to lose ground to renewables like wind and solar, and to cheap and abundant natural gas.

Internationally, important countries like China, India, and South Korea are making big bets on nuclear energy. And those countries are not alone. Globally, the World Nuclear Association reports that more than 160 power reactors are planned, and that another 300 are proposed.

In between the market here in the United States and the one abroad, there's plenty of room for young engineers looking to make their names. But they'll have to be creative.

"As long as you are innovative, the world could be your oyster," says Rod McCullum, a nuclear engineer and senior director of used fuel and decommissioning programs for the Washington D.C.-based Nuclear Energy Institute. "This is an exciting time. It's an industry that has to reinvent itself to survive."

"As long as you are innovative, the world could be your oyster. This is an exciting time. It's an industry that has to reinvent itself to survive."

Specifically, McCullum referenced advanced reactors and small modular reactors, new technology that could be used to generate electricity in isolated areas or produce high-temp process heat for industrial purposes. A stark contrast to the big, plodding nuclear plants that have been the mainstay of the industry for decades, small modular reactors appear to represent the future.

"No one's building those right now," McCullum says, referring to the opportunities offered by the technology.



Tony Leshinski, Nuclear Engineer, State of Vermont



Vermont Yankee nuclear power plant, shuttered in 2014. / Entergy

Able to be made in a factory and much more affordable than the typical power plant, small modular reactors have been identified by the U.S. Department of Commerce as a potential product for a “significant export market.” These small reactors could even be used to replace existing coal-burning plants, according to a study by the Energy Policy Institute at Chicago.

While small modular reactors are expected to emerge as a piece of the domestic nuclear market, the present is dominated by decommissioning. The latest plant to close down was Vermont Yankee in 2014. At least three were decommissioned in 2013. And over the next few years, Fitzpatrick and Pilgrim in the northeast, Clinton and Quad Cities in Illinois, Fort Calhoun in Nebraska, and Diablo Canyon in California, are set for decommissioning. As nuclear continues to compete – and in the case of unregulated merchant plants, oftentimes unsuccessfully – with natural gas and renewables, more plants are likely to follow, according to industry experts.

And therein lies a long-term opportunity for engineers. As is the case with Vermont Yankee, decommissioning could last as long as 60 years and is expected to cost around \$1.2 billion. Decommissioning, site restoration, and spent fuel management are the big issues with closures, and servicing those steps, and innovating along the way, should spell good times for industry firms.

“The companies that are in the business of decommissioning plants will get more work,” McCullum says. “There are

new careers opening up in those areas.”

Decommissioning unfolds as the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, the government agency that monitors plant closures, tries to figure out a cogent process for closing plants. Closures are also taking place as the proposed national repository for spent fuel, Yucca Mountain in Nevada, remains unbuilt. Nuclear fuel is stored in dry casks at decommissioned plants across the country, and is kept under high security.

“The companies that are in the business of decommissioning plants will get more work. There are new careers opening up in those areas.”

Tony Leshinskie, a nuclear engineer who worked for Westinghouse Electric Co. for more than 27 years, is now the state nuclear engineer and decommissioning coordinator for the state of Vermont. He took the job in 2014 to oversee the closure of the Vermont Yankee plant.

The industry, he says, must ask and answer critical questions. Is there a way to mothball a plant in bad times and open it up again when the market is ripe? Should the government grant subsidies for large nuclear power plants?

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CHRISTINA ZWEIG, from page 5

into a solid four-foot fence. Do you want a power struggle with your firm in the face of disaster? Absolutely not. Every person in your firm has an important job to do, but they also have free will. You can harness this free will by empowering your people to use their own creativity and energy, or you can try to micromanage every aspect of every person's job.

As a rider you have to use your eyes, legs, and hands to get your horse pointed in the right direction, then the rest is up to them. As a firm leader, you have to get your firm headed in the right direction, but you certainly can't work on every part of every project and sell more work, answer the phones, and do all the accounting.

"Just like in business, in horseback riding you are never done learning. I try to keep myself educated through reading, watching others ride, and occasional visits to my coach."

As a rider, your eyes are for intention. You always have to focus on where you are going next or your horse won't know where to go and the rest of your body can't do its job properly. As a firm leader, you have to have a clear and established vision. Your number one job is not to put your stamp on every project, but rather set the trajectory for where you are going next.

Your legs are the gas pedal for the horse. A rider's legs move a horse forward, but they also help with steering. As a firm leader it's your job to create energy in your firm

NUCLEAR, from page 7

Though nuclear facilities have the potential to create extraordinary emergencies – the Fukushima Daiichi plant in Japan, for example – nuclear is reliable, carbon-free, and can power big grids. And for those reasons, nuclear will remain relevant, Leshinskie says.

But the industry was caught flat-footed by fracking and natural gas, and did not foresee the steep and prolonged drop in prices that followed.

"A career in nuclear engineering isn't for everyone, but if you get in it and you're good at it, there will always be a demand for your skills."

"I don't think anyone – Wall Street, plant operators, state planners – expected the change to continue this long," Leshinskie says. "The bottom line is that it had a bigger impact than anyone expected."

Even with its woes, nuclear is considered by many to be the best way to achieve aggressive carbon-reduction goals, with the Organization for Economic Co-operation and

that will move it forward. A positive culture, enthusiasm, creativity, all these things will create new opportunities for your firm and be extremely valuable to surviving hardships.

A rider's hands are for steering and putting the brakes on when necessary. Lucinda stressed that it's OK to slow your horse down when faced with a complex or narrow obstacle that demands a lot of accuracy, but you can never stop the forward motion of your horse's legs. As a firm leader you can never let your firm come to a standstill. It always has to grow and move in a focused direction.

Some other lessons I learned from Lucinda Green:

- **Prepare for the worst.** Many A/E/P firm leaders think playing it safe means moving very slowly, taking a long time to make decisions, and never pursuing growth. In situations such as a bad project, a rough economy, or policy changes – all of which are inevitable, by the way, no matter how safe you play it – you need to giddy up and get the heck out of there, not lollygag.
- **Take small risks every day.** Lucinda stressed how important it is to create tiny challenges for your horse to overcome, building on each achievement. Firm leaders need to take risks to grow.
- **Embrace the ugliness.** Your horse has to learn from its own mistakes sometimes. You can point your horse at the fence and encourage it to go over, but where it puts its feet has to be its own choice. If you give your horse enough opportunities to position itself, it will learn and start jumping better and more accurately. As a firm leader, you have to let people make some choices for themselves and learn from the results. They will get quicker, smarter, and better able to do their jobs as a result. ▀

CHRISTINA ZWEIG is Zweig Group's director of research and marketing. Contact her at christinaz@zweiggroup.com.

"I don't think anyone – Wall Street, plant operators, state planners – expected the change to continue this long. The bottom line is that it had a bigger impact than anyone expected."

Development, an intergovernmental group of industrialized countries, estimating that global nuclear energy needs to more than double by 2050. Here in the U.S., Watts Bar 2 in Tennessee just went into operation, and another four licenses have permits for new reactors.

According to a 2014 report by the Congressional Research Service, nuclear engineers are near the top of the earnings bracket in the engineering field, have only a 1.7-percent unemployment rate, and among the entire population of engineers, are a relatively rare breed. All of those are good reasons to consider the field, even as nuclear energy is in transition.

"A career in nuclear engineering isn't for everyone, but if you get in it and you're good at it, there will always be a demand for your skills," Leshinskie says. ▀



The romanticism of mediocrity

Firms like to talk about growth, but fear of risk, and even laziness, contribute to lackluster marketing and timid strategic plans.



Chad
Clinehens

BRAND BUILDING

If asked to offer words that describe your firm, would you use ordinary, average, middle-of-the-road, uninspired, undistinguished, indifferent, unexceptional, unexciting, unremarkable, run-of-the-mill, pedestrian, prosaic, lackluster, forgettable, and amateur? Of course not. You would use words or phrases like superior, innovative, progressive, top-quality, great place to work, fun, experts, and so forth. The unfortunate reality is that our approach to business does not match what we say.

Here are several areas that stick out to me as suffering the most from this over-glorification of being average:

■ **Marketing and branding.** While so many in this industry complain about the perceived continual slide toward becoming a commodity, they do little to combat it. Differentiation is the key to fighting commodity perceptions and pressure on fees. A successful differentiation strategy will move your firm from competing based primarily on price to competing on non-price factors such as quality of service and final product. There are two issues that contribute to the weakness of differentiation strategies – avoidance of risk and just plain laziness.

You must be intentional and willing to take risks by identifying where you are strong and where the

competition is weak. Instead, we look to what others are doing and often mimic them. The result of this lazy approach is that nearly every firm in the industry is a “multi-disciplinary firm that offers cost-effective, innovative solutions.” The remedy here is to develop a true marketing function in your firm. I am not talking about hiring more proposal coordinators. I am talking about real marketing and branding talent that can work with your top leadership in developing a differentiation, branding, and promotion strategy that will transform the firm. If you want to learn more about this type of marketing, Zweig Group is launching a seminar titled Marketing and Branding for AEC Firms that will take a deep dive into this very subject.

See CHAD CLINEHENS, page 12



CALENDAR: AUGUST 2016

conference/seminar webinar award deadline

8.1-3 S3: SLOPES, SLIDES & STABILIZATION SEMINAR

DFI's Deep Foundations for Landslides/Slope Stabilization and Tiebacks & Soil Nailing committees are organizing a three-day event featuring lectures by industry experts on current technologies, key design concepts and case histories that illustrate effective application of deep foundations for stabilization of slopes and excavation support. Recent and future projects will be presented that include challenging slope and landslide repairs and excavation support with deep foundation methods. Equipment, material and instrumentation suppliers, contractors, engineers, and other vendors will present their services in our Exhibit Hall.

location: Denver
more info: dfi.org/s3



8.3-5 AGC IT FORUM CONFERENCE

Goals of the conference:

- Give attendees excellent, practical take-aways from each session; great networking with other technology professionals in the industry
- Leave conference with ideas that could make near-term and long-term positive impact on your company's bottom-line

cost: members: \$329; non-members: \$379
location: Chicago
more info: meetings.agc.org/itforum/

8.4-6 2016 FES/FICE 100TH ANNUAL SUMMER CONFERENCE

Three-day conference presented by FES. This centennial celebration will feature meetings, special events, professional development sessions, and more.

location: Ponte Vedra Beach, FL
more info: fleng.org/seminars.cfm?event_id=715



8.8-10 SAFETY MANAGEMENT TRAINING COURSE

The AGC Safety Management Training Course provides attendees three days of training on the basic skills needed to manage a company safety program in the construction industry. The program builds on Focus Four training and prepares attendees to manage key safety issues on the job site and provides techniques for delivering basic safety training to field personnel. Participants will receive intensive instruction and training that will allow them to return to their firms with readily applicable new skills to positively impact their company's safety and health program.

cost: \$995
location: Honolulu
more info: agc.org/learn/education-training/events/safety-management-training-course



8.11 BECOMING A BETTER RECRUITER

This is a one-day seminar that was specifically developed to help firm principals, managers, HR people, and design and technical professionals in architecture, engineering, planning, and environmental firms become better recruiters. We will help you and your team be more comfortable approaching great talent and learn how to promote the firm, its culture, and career opportunities and advancement.

location: Minneapolis
more info: zweiggroup.com/seminars/better_recruiter/index.php

8.17 FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT FOR NON-FINANCIAL MANAGERS

Solid financial management is crucial to the success of any company, and firms in the A/E/C industry are no exception. This is a one-day seminar that was specifically developed to help design and technical professionals become more comfortable dealing with financial management and accounting. This course helps attendees become better stewards of the company's resources and to better understand how to leverage resources and maximize profit.

cost: first attendee: \$975; additional attendees: \$825
location: Denver
more info: zweiggroup.com/seminars/better_fm/index.php

4.13-15 GEO-CHICAGO 2016

Top reasons to attend:

- Gain state of the practice and art knowledge in the areas of sustainability, geoenvironmental engineering, and energy geotechnics
- Network with your geoenvironmental engineering colleagues from around the world
- Learn from top leaders in the geoenvironmental engineering profession through special plenary sessions, panels, and sessions
- And more!

cost: members: \$825; non-members: \$925
location: Chicago
more info: geoenvironmentconference.org

8.18 WEBED: IMPRESS YOUR PROJECT OWNERS

This webinar will provide attendees with an overview of Workforce Reporting requirements around the country including tracking and monitoring of women, minorities, local hires, disadvantaged/low income, apprentice/trainee and veteran workers. Learn about the pain points associated with complying with these requirements. Find out how you can easily produce real-time, accurate and detailed workforce reports to impress your project owners and potentially earn your company more business!

cost: free
time: 2 p.m.
more info: agc.org/learn/education-training/events/webed-impress-your-project-owners-what-you-need-know-produce-real



Trade show giveaway items

Keep the inexpensive items on the table and hand them out freely, but give the good stuff only to those who seem truly interested in your firm.



**Bernie
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THE FAST LANE

Costs for attending trade shows can range from reasonable to extremely expensive, depending on your level of involvement. In addition to registration, a booth, and perhaps hosting a hospitality event, there is the question of: “What do we give away for a booth visit and/or for attendance at a hospitality event?”

In addition to cost, much of the decision is about “bang for the buck.”

So what do you give away that will be a legitimate marketing/public relations expense? It depends!

My trade show experience has mostly been with A/E or multidiscipline engineering firms.

I worked a company booth where people had to get a card stamped for a drawing. They didn’t care what we did or what we were giving away. They just needed a stamp on a card. You don’t need to give these folks anything.

On one occasion, I told a young man that I would only stamp his card if he spoke with me for two minutes. He said, “Sorry,” and went to the next booth for the stamp. He didn’t need a giveaway item either.

On another occasion, an older woman looked at the giveaway items on my table and said, “I have

five grandchildren. May I have one for each?” I casually asked her which one of her grandchildren purchased engineering services. She gave me a “deer in the headlights” look. Apparently, she thought firms took booths and gave away items just to help her cut Christmas costs.

“Anyone who tells you what their firm needs and lets you talk about how you could help them has earned the more expensive item.”

My experience tells me that you should have two or three gifts at your booth, with one more expensive than the others. The less expensive item(s) can be arranged nicely on the table, and folks can pick up whichever they like. These items are generally pens, mechanical or regular pencils,

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■ **Growth plans.** Another area that suffers from mediocrity is growth plans. Firms do not set high enough goals and then pursue those goals with an aggressive effort. Instead, we say we want to grow, but then we stay busy getting work done when the market is hot. When the market cools, we look back and wish we had done more to make that growth sustainable. I also run into firms that say they don't want to grow for fear that it will change them into something they are not. When it comes to growth, we just don't get serious about it. The fact is, you either grow or you die. Which side of that equation do you want to be on? If you don't evolve and change in a growing way, you will certainly become somebody else – a nobody.

“Nobody wants to be average, but that is the playground of the majority.”

The solution here usually starts with an authentic strategic planning process that is driven by research as opposed to philosophy. After you have a growth oriented vision and plan in place, you must work daily to execute it. Every operational decision must be done with the overall plan in mind, and the incremental steps taken that are necessary for ultimate success.

■ **Organizational structure.** Another huge problem is firms' organizational structure. Investment in staff in this industry is highly reactive. Furthermore, there is an inherent resistance to adding “overhead” or support staff until we are beyond crisis level. This reactive approach to building the or-

ganization breeds mediocrity. When the market is hot, we are all fighting for the same talent, often settling for any “warm body” we can get to help handle the work load. Our resistance to authentic strategic planning and organizational investment sets the table for the feast and famine cycles from which so many firms suffer. The solution here is to use the plan mentioned above to drive investment in staff and resources with particular attention toward marketing, recruiting, and IT. Those three areas are shown to drive growth in professional service firms. Research shows that firms that sustain 20 percent growth rates for three or more years all invest more in marketing, recruiting, and IT than average performing firms.

The idealistic notion we have of ourselves combined with the resistance to change contributes to the romanticism of mediocrity. Nobody wants to be average, but that is the playground of the majority. The tendencies of your peers spell opportunity for you if you can simply spend the needed time to become more than just mediocre. To outperform the market, you must take extraordinary measures and look different in everything you do and say. Make long-term oriented investments in marketing, recruiting, and IT to set the stage for becoming a firm of the future versus a firm of the past. The dangerous romanticism of mediocrity shields us from the reality that we are allowing the market to dictate our success. Create your market and create your success with intensive planning and investments, and start celebrating true achievements. ▀

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key chains, mouse pads, etc.

If you can find an inexpensive item that won't be on every other table, that's even better. For a fun item, one of my employers gave away colored, clear plastic yo-yos with lights that came on when the yo-yo rolled up and down the string. Everyone wanted one, but we knew they were going home to the kids.

Whether someone is just going table to table collecting “stuff,” or sees someone else with the item and asks where they got it, these items get people to your booth.

The more expensive item – which might even be custom made – is kept under the table, out of sight, and given only to those who stick around for some real discussion. Anyone who tells you what their firm needs and lets you talk about how you could help them has earned the more expensive item.

I think the important thing is to have some giveaway item(s) that people will want and use when they get back to work. When I started my business, I had two favorite items.

The first was a leather bookmark. I found that senior people are always reading, and don't want to dog-ear pages. I had someone make me a great leather bookmark with my company information embossed into the leather. Given the size – approximately 1”x 7” – the item was made from scraps that would otherwise have been trashed, so it was inexpensive and available in many colors.

The second was a blank book that I created myself and had printed, cut, and spiral bound. The book was approximately 8”x 8” in size. When opened flat, one side was totally blank. The other side had a light-grey, 1/8” x 1/8” grid, to allow sketching to scale. My engineering clients loved the book and often asked for another when the first was full.

One caution: “Bang for the buck” is about the recipient seeing the give-away item often, for a long time. So you want an item that someone will keep on his/her desk and see all the time. Even better, you want an item they can actually use, like a great pen, the most amazing coffee mug, the best leather binder, etc.

But if you give away an item the person will take home for their child, it won't have the “bang for the buck” you want. The child may love the item, but the prospective client will rarely see it. And yes, the light-up yo-yo mentioned above falls into this category; while it might be remembered by the recipient, its most frequent user would be the child to whom it was passed.

Just like you have to present the facts a client needs to hear rather than just what you want to tell him or her, you must have give-away items that the client will need or want to use daily and not just something you think is “great” or attractive. A pen passed to the receptionist doesn't improve your marketing results, nor does an ordinary coffee mug that gets stuck on a shelf with a dozen other ordinary coffee mugs. ▀

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