Let’s talk about quality

“It seems like there are a million ‘issues’ that can lead to quality problems. Conversely, there are many small things you can do to improve the quality of your firm’s offerings if you really want to!”

Mark Zweig
EDITORIAL

“Quality” is an elusive thing. It’s like a moving target. One person’s definition of high quality could be completely different from another’s. For firms providing architecture, engineering, planning, or related services, it is really all about whether or not the client’s expectations are, at a minimum, met, and ideally, exceeded.

Every owner of every AEC firm says they either provide high quality services or aspire to. The problem is, it doesn’t always work out that way. Some firm principals spend the majority of their day dealing with complaints and unhappy clients. That isn’t “normal” and isn’t how things should be.

If that sounds too familiar to you, here are some thoughts on how you can improve that situation in your firm. None of these ideas is a magic bullet or panacea that will take care of all of your quality woes, but all of them, combined, will help. Here are my thoughts:

1) Make sure you develop the right expectations on the part of your client. A big part of success in this business or any consulting business is managing expectations. As stated earlier, quality is all about meeting or exceeding client expectations. It may seem obvious but to do that, first you have to know what those expectations are. And if they seem unrealistic, it is your responsibility to educate the client. Ignore my advice at your own peril!

2) Let everyone on the project team (and the firm, if necessary) know what that specific client’s expectations are. It’s not good enough to know the expectations and then make sure the client knows what they will get. You still have to let everyone who is working
Business News

Arup expands Bay Area presence in downtown Oakland

Arup, a global design and consulting firm, announces the opening of its newest office at 1330 Broadway in Oakland. The office – covering 16,000 square feet – will house a team of 50 engineers and consultants with expansion space for 100 staff.

“arup is excited to grow our Bay Area presence to better serve our East Bay clients and to be part of the Oakland community,” said Aidan Hughes, principal and group leader of Arup’s San Francisco office.

Arup Oakland will open as a multidisciplinary office, providing professional services including building and infrastructure engineering and consulting services. The office leadership team will consist of John Worley, Joseph Collins, Jacob Wood, and Sara Paul.

John Worley, principal and office leader in Oakland, said, “We wanted to expand our footprint across the bay for a while. We currently have 300 people in San Francisco. Expanding to Oakland provides growth opportunities for our team and better service for our East Bay clients. Looking ahead, the Oakland office will continue to grow as part of the city’s dynamic growth.”

Arup’s Oakland office expansion was a collaboration with TMG Partners, Gensler, Skyline Construction, and Cushman Wakefield, and highlights the firm’s collaborative culture and history of innovation.

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on the project know what the client expects. Most AEC firms do a horrible job at this. The principal and maybe the PM know what the client wants but everyone else working on the job operates from assumptions. This KILLS quality!

3) Assign the “right” people to the project. Again, more easily said than done. But it takes some thought and some common sense, and maybe even some reshuffling of responsibilities across all of your projects to match up the people on your project team with the client they will be working for. It’s critical to the clients’ perception of your service quality to do so.

4) Make sure you hire the right people in the first place so you have them there when you need them. If you don’t have the right kinds of people on staff there’s no chance you will get them on your project. Be picky! Insist on hiring people who not only have the requisite technical skills but also the soft skills needed for success in this business. Those include responsiveness, the ability to communicate successfully verbally and in-writing, and a track record of working well as a part of a team. These things are extremely crucial to get high marks on quality of service from a client.

5) Develop “appropriate” standards and then make sure they are applied. I say "appropriate" because one standard doesn’t apply to all clients and all project types and trying to do that when it can’t be done is the undoing of many QA/QC processes. People realize the standard isn’t appropriate and just give up on the entire process (bad). You also have to be sure – just from a liability perspective – that whatever standards you say you will follow you follow every time.

6) Specialize! Specialization leads to higher quality because everyone can anticipate typical problems and has experience in overcoming them. Many design and technical professionals still fight specialization – particularly smaller firms – but it is to their detriment in terms of both profitability and quality.

7) Celebrate quality successes. There’s data to show what a great project you did. Real evidence of success. The client has called or written gushing about the service you provided. Publicize these things! Share them throughout the firm. And include your subconsultants, too, if they deserve some of the credit. Feel good and enjoy your quality victories.

8) Learn from quality failures. I have never been a big believer in the mantra of “fail early, fail often.” I would hope we can learn from our previous mistakes as well as those of others and not have to learn every single thing ourselves from scratch. I also think some quality errors (think Jack Gillum and the Kansas City Hyatt Regency disaster) can kill people. Mistakes are bad and to be avoided if possible – but if we can’t always be a success we do need to ask “what went wrong” and “how can we avoid that in the future.”

It seems like there are a million “issues” that can lead to quality problems. Conversely, there are many small things you can do to improve the quality of your firm’s offerings if you really want to! ⬤

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Writing less

It can be harder than writing more, but oftentimes it’s necessary, so learn how to cut without gutting your message.

When I started writing this column in 2004, the size limit was 800-850 words. Sometimes, the topic was one about which I could write much more than the limit. But this was my column, so I could rethink and tweak the idea and title until I had a subject for which I could stay within the word limit.

Now the size limit is 650 words, but my process is pretty much the same.

I start with a “brain dump” – getting as much information as possible from my brain to the document. That is always more words than the limit. Sometimes, many more words.

So I read everything and determine what thoughts do not really “earn their place” in the document. Next, I reorganize for smooth “flow.” Then I read again to determine, based on the new juxtaposition of ideas, what other thoughts do not earn their place, and delete them. Now I’m down to about 800 words and I still need to cut. The next round of cuts is done like a surgeon with a scalpel – one word or phrase at a time – until I’m close enough to the limit to submit the article.

The challenge: making all these cuts without gutting your message.

“Proposal limitations are very different. Instead of a maximum number of words, you get a maximum number of pages and, possibly, limitations on font sizes and margins.”

See BERNIE SIBEN, page 4
FENWAY CENTER READY TO START CONSTRUCTION

Joint venture partners Gerding Edlen, TH Real Estate, and Meredith Management have signed a long-term ground lease with the Massachusetts Department of Transportation for Phase I of Fenway Center. The $240 million mixed-use property spans 4.5 acres and is located between Brookline, Beacon Street, David Ortiz Way, and the Massachusetts Turnpike. Construction is scheduled to begin immediately.

The Architectural Team, Inc. located in Chelsea, Massachusetts, is the architecture firm for Fenway Center and the interior design firm is Planeta Design Group of Boston. The general contractor for Fenway Center is John Moriarty & Associates. Construction for Phase I began in December and is slated to be completed by the beginning of 2020.

The announcement was made by the developer, Fenway Center Development LLC, a partnership of Gerding Edlen and John Rosenthal.

Located adjacent to the revitalized Yawkey Station and Fenway Park, Fenway Center, once fully completed, will create 1,800 new construction jobs, 126 new permanent jobs, and more than $2.4 billion in economic impact over 99 years. Additional benefits will include $600 million investment to the area and $5.7 million in property taxes per year during the build out phase. Fifteen percent of the market rate units will be designated affordable with two-thirds of the units being on-site.

Phase I will take two years to complete and will comprise two residential apartment buildings with 312 apartments, 37,000-square-feet of ground floor retail and 200 underground parking spaces. It will also include a 12,000-square-foot air rights deck and landscaped pedestrian walkway over Yawkey Station between Beacon St. and Yawkey Station.

Fenway Center is designed to be a model for smart growth, transit and sustainable energy oriented development respecting the urban grid, replacing a large surface parking lot and filling in existing space between long, wind-swept bridges with new buildings and retail amenities along Beacon Street and Brookline Avenue. The buildings are arranged so that the taller buildings are located adjacent to Yawkey Station, serving as an architectural marker and gateway, while the smaller buildings are scaled down in respect to the Audubon Circle neighborhood and Fenway Park area.

BERNIE SIBEN, from page 3

“Go back to the request for proposals. What information did the client ask for? And in what order? This is what the client wants to see and how the client wants your submittal organized.”

But the client has imposed a limitation of 25 pages for the submittal.

Now you spend hours cutting text, replacing paragraphs with bullet lists, wondering if you can describe the proposed staff in a one- or two-page table, emailing the client’s contact to ask about putting actual resumes in an appendix whose pages aren’t counted.

You get down to 22 pages. Then the technical lead gives you a six-page project approach! And you have to start cutting again, without gutting the approach or omitting something critical from the document.

There is a better way!

You can deliver fewer than the maximum number of pages. When appointed to a selection committee, the normal daily workload of the client’s staff member doesn’t go away. So they love submittals that are shorter than the limit.”

Go back to the request for proposals. What information did the client ask for? And in what order? This is what the client wants to see and how the client wants your submittal organized. Then you can go to your boilerplate or previous proposals and pull only the information that was requested.

In addition to the clues provided in the RFP regarding content and organization, the RFP may also include the client’s evaluation criteria. There may be items here in addition to the content clues provided earlier in the RFP. Without changing the organization of your submittal, you have to make sure you have addressed these criteria.

Remember: Your proposal must be about what the client wants to hear, and not what you want to say.

If you do all this and still end up under the page limit, you can add other information you think will help the owner choose your firm or team. You can also deliver fewer than the maximum number of pages. When appointed to a selection committee, the normal daily workload of the client’s staff member doesn’t go away. So they love submittals that are shorter than the limit.

And by the way, even if the RFP doesn’t include page limits, font, or margin requirements, most clients still appreciate brevity, especially when dealing with the kinds of projects for which they might receive dozens of proposals.

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The Principals Academy is Zweig Group's flagship training program encompassing all aspects of managing a professional AEC service firm. It's the most impactful two days you can spend learning about principal leadership, financial management, recruiting, marketing, business development, and project management.

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

- Business Planning
- Marketing/Business Development
- Accounting
- Financial Management
- Project Management
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- Mergers & Acquisitions
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Conference call: Brian Sullivan

CEO of Sullivan Engineering (Hot Firm #89 for 2017), a 20-person building envelope consulting firm based in New York, New York.

By LIISA ANDREASSEN
Correspondent

“We strongly reward autonomy and encourage each other to make our supervisors feel useless,” says Sullivan, referring to the role of entrepreneurship in his firm.

A CONVERSATION WITH BRIAN SULLIVAN.

The Zweig Letter: The talent war in the A/E industry is here. What steps do you take to create the leadership pipeline needed to retain your top people and not lose them to other firms?

Brian Sullivan: We are proactive in sharing the company vision for the next 10 years and beyond. We identify opportunities that will become available and try to assist all of our team members to identify the specific aspects of their role that they love and are great at doing. With our top people, we’re regularly providing the opportunity to work on other aspects of the business that may not be part of their current role now, but could lead to a future leadership role. We continually try to build a strong team by hosting social events after work, regularly sharing personal and professional victories before each weekly team meeting and making sure that our team knows that we are here to assist each other in developing as individuals, not just professionals.

TZL: As you look for talent, what position do you most need to fill in the coming year and why?

BS: In addition to adding more technical team members, we’ll likely add more administrative support to allow more of our engineers and architects to focus on their strengths and delegate their weaknesses.
TZL: While plenty of firms have an ownership transition plan in place, many do not. What’s your advice for firms that have not taken steps to identify and empower the next generation of owners?

BS: There is a strong sense of security that comes from knowing a transition plan exists. A/E firms with a sole ownership structure could be susceptible to large risk should anything happen to the owner. While it may not be discussed openly, many team members likely consider this an issue – lack of a plan in place leads to uncertainty throughout the team. From the start, we established and regularly discuss a transition plan.

TZL: Monthly happy hours and dog friendly offices. What do today’s CEOs need to know about today’s workforce?

BS: The type of team members who we recruit are those driven by more than just compensation. They want to genuinely enjoy being on our team; they want to connect on non-professional levels; and they want to serve a greater purpose than just the day-to-day tasks of incremental growth. If they connect with their fellow team members, are in sync with the core values of the firm, and believe in the vision, they will do everything in their power to ensure success.

TZL: Zweig Group research shows there has been a shift in business development strategies. More and more, technical staff, not marketing staff, are responsible for BD. What’s the BD formula in your firm?

BS: We recently hired a non-technical business development associate. Prior to that it was all handled by the technical team. As a result, we didn’t have a consistent backlog of work. We fell into the trap of being more aggressive in BD as workloads began to slow down and less aggressive when we were busy with active projects. Our new BD associate, who has never having worked in the AEC industry, has come up to speed much faster than we had envisioned and is doing a great job opening doors, generating proposals, and establishing processes to ensure a steadier backlog. This also allows our technical staff to focus more on providing a better experience for our clients which leads to more recurring work.

“We recognize that goals are often not missed because of lack of effort, but more commonly due to an increase in non-billable assignments that are focused on improving our processes.”

TZL: Diversifying the portfolio is never a bad thing. What are the most recent steps you’ve taken to broaden your revenue streams?

BS: We are committed to remaining in our core focus of exterior restoration services; however, over the past two years we’ve made a concentrated effort to expand into the commercial as well as institutional/educational sectors. Throughout 2018, we’ll likely add complementary areas of practice to support our core focus, like non-destructive testing and structural engineering support services.

“The type of team members who we recruit are those driven by more than just compensation. They want to genuinely enjoy being on our team; they want to connect on non-professional levels; and they want to serve a greater purpose than just the day-to-day tasks of incremental growth.”

TZL: The list of responsibilities for project managers is seemingly endless. How do you keep your PMs from burning out? And if they crash, how do you get them back on the road, so to speak?

BS: We try to emphasize the relative short duration of spikes that result from the somewhat seasonal nature of our business. We discuss the rewards that come at the end of the spike like our Christmas shutdown and Winter Fridays. We remind each other to intentionally plan additional time with our loved ones, especially during the slower season. At the start of our weekly team meetings – to help keep a positive mindset – we identify one personal best and one professional best that occurred for each individual. We also encourage team members to use all of their vacation and personal days to recharge.

TZL: What is the role of entrepreneurship in your firm?

BS: An entrepreneurial mindset is a very strong focus within our team. We recently started monthly mini-assignments for all team members that help develop/foster an entrepreneurial way of thinking. We strongly reward autonomy and encourage each other to make our supervisors feel useless. At the end of 2015, we began incorporating the Entrepreneurial Operating System into our business and have seen tremendous success from the results in how we lead, the processes we have in place and the ability to analyze and assess goals and results.

TZL: In the next couple of years, what A/E segments will heat up, and which ones will cool down?

BS: We anticipate an increased focus on renovations and adaptive reuse that provide more affordable/sustainable housing.
TZL: They say failure is a great teacher. What’s the biggest lesson you’ve had to learn the hard way?

BS: Our biggest lessons have been in hiring: should’ve hired sooner and in a few instances should’ve taken more time to evaluate candidates in the interview process. Additionally, delegating has been an issue; more specifically recognizing that just because I don’t like doing certain tasks doesn’t mean that other people on our team also don’t like doing them.

TZL: While M&A is always an option, there’s something to be said about organic growth. What are your thoughts on why and how to grow a firm?

BS: So far all of our growth has been organic. It seems easier to control company culture, quality of work, and the core values. However, we recognize the benefits of acquisitions, particularly as we consider opening offices in other cities as well as adding complementary practice areas.

“This biggest lessons have been in hiring: should’ve hired sooner and in a few instances should’ve taken more time to evaluate candidates in the interview process.”

TZL: Do you use historical performance data or metrics to establish project billable hours and how does the type of contract play into determining the project budget?

BS: To date we’ve used historical data; but are now incorporating metrics.

TZL: What's your prediction for 2018?

BS: Continued growth for the A/E industry and for Sullivan Engineering (Hot Firm List again!). M&A activity will likely continue as large firms continue to compete with ever-growing competition. As for the smaller firms, acquisitions will continue while baby boomers who are sole owners approach retirement.
Change – a simple yet loaded word, particularly these days. Unless you spent the last year under a rock, you must have noticed that things are rather in flux – make that very in flux. With all the change happening, there is great temptation to escape the discomfort it causes by running for cover. It’s a normal reaction. However, the cost is an opportunity to lead in a different direction.

Clients have evolved, and if you want stay connected with them, you have to learn who they are, what they want, and where you fit.

Avoiding a trip down the jagged corridor of our political environment, let us look at change in the A/E industry. The fundamentals of designing, permitting, and constructing a building do not change. There are only so many ways to apply the laws of physics to create a physical structure that rises out of the ground, remains in place, and looks good.

So, what has changed?

Clients.

A/E industry executives lament how in the “good old days,” clients valued and willingly paid for professional guidance. Now they want expeditious results, technological solutions, and commodity pricing. That is a tough reality for the dedicated A/E design community, one that inhabits the world of the intense details and nuancing needed for successful projects. Nevertheless, without those unappreciative ratepayers, there is no income stream.

So, what to do?

“To win over an unconvinced audience, you have to move into the discomfort zone, taking behavioral risks to learn who they are, what they want, and where you fit.”

See JULIE BENEZET, page 10
clients:

Here are four ways to close the gap between you and your clients in a rapidly changing world.

1) Understand that clients lack the bandwidth to understand or care about your work. When I joined Amazon in 1998 as its first global real estate executive, for the first time in my career I experienced life as an expense sump rather than income generator. To succeed, we had to accept that our clients only cared about real estate when it failed. Once in a while they liked it (especially if it involved food service), but that was the exception.

What mattered to them was their work. The hyper-connected digital world required inventing and testing new products and services at warp speed. The last thing they wanted was to expend precious brain cells learning about stodgy bricks and mortar. What was true in 1998 is now universal to business, even with the addition to real estate of highly technical solutions.

2) Winning means convincing your client to care on their terms. A/E professionals often are reluctant to leave their comfort zone of design and techno speak. What they fail to notice is the audience for A/E speak is limited. To close the communication gap between you and your client, explore how they define success. That opens the channel to their willingness to hear how you can serve them. It requires business oriented inquiries rather than technical requirement discussions. Converting their needs into design is your job after you understand them.

3) To close the gap, you have to change. To gain client trust demands not only asking questions, but also answering questions you did not expect. Today’s knowledge workers, particularly the new generation of Generation X executives, measure worth based on data, metrics, and pushing the envelope. They will happily challenge everything you say, including things you always took for granted. “Well, why can’t we install screens in the middle of our spaces?” To prove your value, you either have to concede or, better, confess ignorance and commit to finding a great solution.

4) To prove your value, empower your listener. While they are unlikely to admit it, clients dislike not knowing what you do. It takes them out of their comfort zone. Your job is to empower them to hold up their end of the conversation. To achieve that, try converting highly technical information and design ideas into understandable terms. Using everyday analogies (“It’s like when you finally take apart that broken grill and discover …”) and visual aids bring them into the discussion. Keep it simple, but not simple minded.

Change is hard, for everyone, but the reward of entering the discomfort zone is valuable new information and opportunity.
Seasons of change

At all times, there can and must be all four seasons within a person and a company – tilling, planting, toil, and harvest – to create growth.

The start of a new year always brings great optimism in our personal lives. But the same can also be said for our companies. Optimism is necessary. Who would leave their house in the morning if they knew it would all be bad all day?

Our pastor at church recently gave a sermon in which he discussed that every season is not a season of harvest. He explained that there are seasons of tilling the soil, planting seasons, seasons of toil, and only then, the seasons of harvest. On any given item in our personal and professional lives, every season is not a season of harvest. Sometimes we must clear the field, till it up, plant the next crop, and work the land to make sure it produces. The farmer calls that his work.

That much is a clear to any of us when we consider it conscientiously. The trick comes with understanding what season you intend to be in on any given item, and knowing what season you’re actually in, and being able to reconcile the two. At all times, there can and must be all four seasons within a person and a company to create growth. Unrelated items do not generally move in tandem; everything is not up all the time, but everything is also not down all the time (forgetting 2008, of course).

“There are seasons of tilling the soil, planting seasons, seasons of toil, and only then, the seasons of harvest. On any given item in our personal and professional lives, every season is not a season of harvest.”

So when we turn the page to a new year, it’s easy for us to think that it’s time for a season of harvest. But we must look more closely and understand that it’s really a different picture.
ON THE MOVE

AFTER 50 YEARS, PLESS OF BENNETT & PLESS RETIRING Following a long career as co-founder and business leader, Bennett & Pless’ Rex Pless, B.Sc., PE, announced his retirement from the company set for the end of the year. Pless, who joined Moe Bennett’s firm E.M. Bennett in 1967, quickly rose to co-owner and president. The two renamed the firm Bennett & Pless, a name which became synonymous in Atlanta with high-quality engineering.

“Rex not only has years of outstanding service to the Atlanta community but has provided strategic leadership through the early days of Bennett & Pless and has continued to provide valuable counsel to our clients and our staff,” said Ed Gazzola, M.Eng., P.Eng., PE, CEO of Bennett & Pless.

“I want to publicly thank Rex for his service and dedication to serving our clients and growing the firm to one of the most respected structural engineering firms in the Southeast.” In addition to Pless’ service to Bennett & Pless, he was instrumental to the local construction community, having served as president of ACEC and chairman of the Structural Committee of the Georgia Building Code. Additional affiliations include Consulting Engineers Council of Georgia (director and officer: eight-plus years); American Concrete Institute; American Institute of Steel Construction; and Callanwolde Foundation in DeKalb County (past board of directors and treasurer).

Pless has successfully transitioned the ownership and management of the firm, which has expanded to four offices and doubled in size over the past three years. This has allowed the firm to carry on its strong legacy and continue adding to Atlanta’s skyline, having designed marquee buildings such as Colony Square, Monarch Office Towers in Buckhead, Atlanta Financial Center, Wildwood Office Complex, the Westin & Marriott Hotels in Buckhead, Embassy Suites at Centennial Park and Cobb Galleria, as well as numerous national and international projects.

The lifelong resident of Atlanta was educated at the University of Tennessee and Georgia Institute of Technology. “Those of us that know Rex personally admire him not only for his technical know-how and business acumen but also for his personal lifetime values as a devoted husband and father,” Gazzola said.

“We wish Rex many more years of good health and happiness and look forward to him still being involved as a consultant to the firm on specialty projects on occasion, while also enjoying golf and traveling.”

MICHAEL BONOMO JOINS CANNONDESIGNAS PRINCIPAL, DIRECTOR OF GLOBAL WORKPLACE AND CO-LEADER OF CORPORATE/COMMERCIAL MARKET CannonDesign is excited to announce Michael Bonomo has joined the firm as Principal, Director of Global Workplace and Co-Leader of its Corporate/Commercial market. An innovative leader who has directly influenced over 10 million sf of interior environments across tech, corporate, retail and experiential spaces, Michael will focus on growing CannonDesign’s workplace brand, capabilities and teams with initial focus in New York City and San Francisco.

“It takes dynamic people to deliver dynamic work and Michael is one of the best in the world when it comes to creating successful workplaces,” said Meg Osman, executive director of CannonDesign’s global Corporate/Commercial market. “We could not be more thrilled to have him join our team and look forward to how he will inspire our clients, team members and design process in creating memorable solutions that advance culture, talent and business.”

During his career, Michael has collaborated with leading global companies including Bloomberg, Honeywell, Kate Spade, Time Warner, Huffington Post, Spotify and HSBC to name a few. He’s also an important industry voice as a member of Contract magazine’s advisory board, a regular panelist at key events including the Contemporary Furniture Fair, and a professional member of IDAs New York Chapter. Prior to joining CannonDesign, Michael served as M Moser Associates’ Creative Director of North America.

Remarkably creative, skilled and versatile, Michael has led award-winning work for companies of all type, complexity and scale. His work is also regularly published by Interior Design, Contract, Commercial Property Executive, DEMO Magazine, Visual Merchandising and Store Design and Perspective New York.

“Becoming part of the CannonDesign team is a tremendous opportunity to leverage my talents in exciting new ways with remarkable clients,” said Bonomo. “CannonDesign has such strong market presence, design talent and geographic reach, the potential to help clients create beautiful workplaces that promote wellness and employee satisfaction, increase recruitment and retention, accelerate innovation and strengthen their bottom line is almost limitless.”

To help Michael achieve this potential, CannonDesign is actively hiring new workplace designers, project managers and business development leaders and teams in New York City and San Francisco.

“There are exciting shifts currently occurring in how and where we work. We’re seeing dynamic changes in how people engage and are supported by agile spaces which ultimately drive key business objectives for global companies today,” added Bonomo. “Our profession has a real opportunity to shape this future and we’re looking for people interested in seizing that opportunity. I can’t wait to start.”

WILL SCHNIER, from page 11

all have parts of our operations that need attention, and perhaps some clearing of the land. We have other things that are ready to be planted or started, and others still that are really ready to produce a bumper crop.

“When we turn the page to a new year, it’s easy for us to think that it’s time for a season of harvest. But we must look more closely and understand that it’s really a different picture.”

As the leader of our company, it’s been a tremendous experience learning these lessons and many more firsthand since we started our firm nine years ago. There is a famous sentiment that suggests one can either succeed or learn, but need not fail.

Our firm had many successes in 2017, both internal achievements and the notice of external recognition. But we also learned many lessons in 2017 that will prove to be very valuable in 2018 and beyond. In some sense, this is the same as any year we’ve had. To continue the biblical undertone, “There is nothing new under the sun”.

We all know that this is a people business. I am filled with gratitude for our team members and my partners in the firm. Whatever 2018 holds for us, I’m thankful to be running our farm – I mean our firm – together.

After all, the farmer’s work is also ours. ▶

WILL SCHNIER is CEO of BIG RED DOG Engineering & Consulting. He can be reached at will.schnier@bigreddog.com.