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Final Countdown to Principal: Advice for Up and Comers

by Chris Klemmer, P.E.

Agreeing to become a Principal (equity owner) in an A/E/C firm has lasting consequences. Don't leap for the power and prestige without considering the deeper responsibilities and challenges.

Do Your Due Diligence.

Study your firm as the prospective purchaser you are. Assess the financials of the firm like an investment. Would you invest in this company as a stockholder? Consider what customers, stakeholders, and competitors say about the firm. Choose your fellow Principals wisely. You will be "married" to them for the next 20 years or more. Get to know their visions, biases, and foibles. Do as much research as possible by yourself, but be sure to include the counsel of knowledgeable experts that you hire, in addition to those provided by the firm.

Learn How the Business Really Works,

Enlist the support of a willing, able, and trustworthy Partner to be your transition guide or coach. They have information and perspective only an insider can provide. Start by examining the firm's succession plan for you. Does it identify a cadre of future leaders including several likely to be your successor? If not, leadership development is a serious issue that needs immediate attention; and the viability of your own transition plan may need reconsideration. Speak openly with fellow Principals on matters of succession, money, raises, bonuses, promotions, hiring/firing, and policy while assessing how decisions are made and the role you play.

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A Guide to Internal Influencing – Your First Sales Job!

by Mike Sweeney

Most technical professionals think that the best way to be productive is to stick to what they know. But inside that knowledge, we also see the potential to work smarter, and more efficiently, so that we have time left to enjoy life. Accomplishing this requires getting the support of others within your company - and that is what they call "a sales job!"

Influencing is an important career survival skill that only develops out of necessity. It can be scary for a variety of reasons, especially if you tend to leave selling to the "sales types." In the long run, becoming an effective and confident influencer will help you stay motivated – and advance!

You may want your firm to adopt an emerging standard, try out a novel approach to design or administration, or work with (or obtain training for) a new tool. Here are some steps to becoming a successful influencer.

1. Know What You Want To Accomplish. Pick a battle small enough to win, and big enough to matter. With that, be clear why it matters – both to you, and to your company. Even when it all seems elementary to you,

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A Guide to Internal Influencing – Your First Sales Job! *(continued from page 1)*

take care to put the benefits into clear terms. Don't just push a "solution"; first identify a problem, and then connect that problem to a larger organizational problem that your boss must take action on.

2. Support Your Argument With Facts. You can find case studies from other firms, conduct your own time-and-motion studies, or cite industry research reports. Get used to stating any savings or productivity gains in financial terms. For example, if you spend an hour every week filling out a paper timesheet instead of ten minutes, your company is spending (or losing) six times what it could be earning!

3. Use the language your company already speaks. Does senior management regularly mention "work-life balance," "keeping overhead low," or "reducing overtime?" What terms are you hearing around the office or reading in office-wide emails?

4. Know Who Your Audience Is. Who makes the decision – or who is close to that person? You may need to appeal to your teammates, an IT manager, a number-cruncher, or an office manager if you want to involve junior staff.

5. Know What Types Of Communication Work Best. Do the people you want to influence respond better to emails or printed reports, viewing slideshows or actively debating alternatives? Do they need to come up with the idea themselves? Do they need to hear it several times before they've internalized it enough to act? Get over the idea that you're somehow being manipulative, pandering, or politicking. If you have a valid initiative, and you know and can prove or demonstrate that it will improve the company's prospects, client retention, industry visibility, profitability, etc., figure out how to work that into your value proposition.

6. Check Your Ego. Remember why you are doing this in the first place. This is not about showing that you are smarter than the people in charge or that you are suffering more than anyone else. Seeking personal advancement is fine, but don't over-reach. Be humble, believe in yourself, and have a plan for tracking your initiative's progress.

7. Be The Victor, Write The History. Once you have what you set out for, make sure the record reflects your contributions; add the results into your resume, and mention them in your performance review. If it takes longer for the initiative to bear fruit, keep reporting on it as the results come in.

Make working easier on yourself and add value for your company! By doing this, you will be on your way to being an influential voice within your firm - a trusted resource who has consistently demonstrated the effectiveness of sound ideas - and a key player in your firm's success. ■

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Keep Your Subconsultants in the Loop

Failures by your subconsultants can lead to serious liability claims and potential losses. Your first line of control over potential risk is a well-written agreement. But you can also avoid problems with proper communication. Make sure your expectations are clear, and follow the points below. Your subconsultants are an integral part of your team!

- **Include subconsultants in project meetings.** Including subs in team meetings helps them to feel like they're part of the project team and to understand their role. Establishing good rapport with subs at the beginning of a project makes it easier to work with them during crunch times.

Your first line of control over potential risk is a well-written agreement. But you can also avoid problems with proper communication.

- **Share your standards.** A pre-project meeting is a good time to make your expectations clearly known to subs. Presenting them with a detailed scope-of-work description, a set of correct drawings, and a written deadline will help them perform their job. It will help

them understand where they may have deviated from your standards of performance.

- **If necessary, require the sub to perform the services in your office.** This is important when coordination between disciplines and staff is complex, where quality assurance requirements must be maintained.

- **Support your subs.** Ask your subs if there's anything you can do to help make their part of the project delivery more efficient. Then follow through on their requests. Also paying subs on time will establish a good working relationship that will continue past the end of your project. ■

UPCOMING INDUSTRY EVENTS: AUGUST 2012

Do you want to be a more efficient and productive Project Manager? PSMJ can help. Don't miss your opportunity to attend these events:

Project Management Bootcamp Series

July 19-20, 2012 - San Francisco, CA

July 26-27, 2012 - Washington, DC

August 2-3, 2012 - Seattle, WA

A/E/C Financial Management

July 19-20, 2012 - Boston, MA

July 26-27, 2012 - Denver, CO

August 2-3, 2012 - Chicago, IL

More information at www.psmj.com, or call (617) 965-0055