

# Editorial | Developing Strategies for Growth and Success

By Carrie Johnson, P.E., SECB



Leaders are expected to navigate effectively through a wide variety of social and professional situations with a wide variety of people. More often than not, however, engineering firms promote engineers who are successful at the technical requirements of the job into areas that require skills they haven't been trained for—leadership, business development, public speaking, and conflict management. Shouldn't we, as a profession, devote more time to the discussion and development of strategies for long-term growth and success, including leadership training and more?

Three years ago, NCSEA determined that it would provide a vehicle to help structural engineering firms do exactly that. The 2-day program includes a mix of lectures, panel discussions, case studies, and plenty of time for interaction and networking with fellow attendees. Attendance is limited to structural engineering principals and those in leadership positions, which makes this a unique opportunity. Past attendees have had high praise for both the format and the presentations. Here are a few examples:

- "It is one of the best ways to learn skills not normally pursued by engineers even though it is one of the more critical aspects of our practice" – Joseph W. Carone
- "A perfect mix of networking and business learning. The Winter Leadership Forum will be on my calendar every year" – Chris Hofheins
- "Excellent mix of participants—small, mid & large firms, good geographic mix. The topics were excellent and speakers also. Even the sessions that I thought would not be interesting were, in fact, excellent!" – Jay Shapiro

NCSEA's next Winter Leadership Forum will be held January 29–30, 2015, in Coral Gables, Florida. The theme is *Developing Strategies for Growth and Success*. The presentations will answer the following questions:

- What are your clients really looking for when selecting a consultant?
- How can engineering firms increase their value to clients?
- Can you ever win when you are competing solely on price?
- How do you make sure your whole team is working to provide what your client needs?
- Should you grow your firm organically or by acquisition?
- What role does your relationship with your banker play in your success?
- Should you purchase a firm or pass? A Case Study

Our Thursday morning session will answer the first question by introducing the audience to the results of major research performed by the Society for Marketing Professional Services (SMPS) Foundation. The SMPS Foundation interviewed more than 100 buyers and sellers of A/E/C services and asked questions about what works, what doesn't, and how clients want to be sold. The answers were surprising and thought-provoking. Scott Butcher, an SMPS Foundation Trustee, and Brad Thurman, Past-President of SMPS, will present the results.

We will then delve further into successful business development with three separate panel discussions.

The first session will be moderated by Robb Dibble, founder of Dibble Engineers. It will explore various ways structural engineers can ensure being a valued member of the team by providing services that they may not have previously considered. The second panel discussion will be moderated by Scott Butcher and will focus on pursuing projects. Pre-positioning, business development, and go/no-go decisions will be discussed and analyzed. Our final panel discussion for the day will address strategies for building relationships and creating repeat clients. I will be moderating that session and will discuss ways to train your entire staff to be responsive to your client's needs.

Friday will offer four different types of presentations, beginning with a panel session that will evolve into a debate on how best to grow your company: Through organic growth or through growth by acquisition? The debate will be moderated by Jonathan Hernandez, a Partner at Gilsanz Murray Steficek and will provide valuable insights and information on successful tactics that have worked for others. This will be followed by a presentation from Terry Vanderaa, Chairman of Providence Bank and former CEO of an international transportation company that sold for \$349 million. He will discuss what to look for when starting a banking relationship, including how to determine if a bank is the right size for your business.

Friday afternoon, John Tawresey, former CFO of KPFF Consulting Engineers, will wrap up the program with a case study that digs deep into the question of growth by acquisition. Participants in the session will become members of the Board of Directors of a company being approached by a smaller firm, one that is located in a different geographical market and with expertise in curtainwall design, which the larger firm has never done. The Board will be given information about the smaller firm's financials, markets, business practices, corporate climate, key employees and owner's transition, along with alternative valuation models, deal breakers, and other considerations, and some basic decision theory. The question to the Board will be: Should the firm be acquired or should your company pass? If the decision is to acquire, how much is your company willing to pay?

I hope you will join us in sunny Florida this January for what promises to be another great event! You will leave with insight on how to run your firm with new-found confidence and excitement. A full description can be found on the NCSEA website, [www.ncsea.com](http://www.ncsea.com).



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## SAVE The Date

January 29-30, 2015



Plan to join NCSEA at the Hyatt Regency Coral Gables for the 2015 Winter Leadership Forum.

[www.ncsea.com](http://www.ncsea.com)