

Editorial | In Pursuit of Better

By Brian Dekker, P.E., S.E., LEED AP, NCSEA President



I'd like to wish you a Belated Happy New Year! If you're anything like me, you're still trying to break the habit of writing 2015 on checks instead of 2016; however, I think 2016 is finally starting to come easier and the year itself is picking up some momentum.

Construction spending is at its highest level since the Great Recession, and most design firms are seeing a relatively steady increase in work. Continued growth will depend on a variety of factors, most of which are outside the control of structural engineers. There's not much we can do, for example, about Federal Reserve rates, gasoline prices, unemployment rates, GDP, or government policies. There are plenty of ways, however, that we can continue to grow on a personal level and within our firms.

Personally, I like setting goals for the year, similar to New Year's resolutions, even if I don't actually start them on January 1. Although 92% of Americans fail to accomplish their New Year's resolutions, I think that might be because most New Year's resolutions relate to personal improvement. We all want to become a better version of ourselves. That could mean losing weight, getting organized, spending less money, saving more money, eating healthy, quitting smoking, or learning something new. I think the best way to improve your own life, however, is to first concentrate on improving the lives of those around you. Zig Ziglar said it well, "You can have everything in life you want if you will just help enough other people get what they want." It's sad that relatively few New Year's resolutions seek to improve other people's lives.

So my question for you is this: What if there was a way to improve yourself and others at the same time? If you're a leader in your firm, the 2016 NCSEA Winter Leadership Forum (WLF) can help you do exactly that.

Professional success is a critical factor in people's lives. As a leader in your firm, you have a major influence on the way that people feel about their jobs. Are you using your influence to help others in your firm succeed? At the WLF on Thursday, Staci Ketay Rotman, Attorney with Franczek Radelet P.C., will teach us a variety of ways to not only improve policies and procedures in the workplace, but also help employees feel more comfortable there. Staci will explain the legal aspects of how to hire the best candidates, how to prevent discrimination and harassment in the workplace, how to discipline problem employees, and how to make employee handbooks work for you, not against you. In brief, her session will enlighten you on how to make your employees more comfortable with your expectations of them while minimizing your risks of litigation. Have your questions ready. She is up for the challenge!

Maintaining a stable business is essential to helping employees reach their goals. The success of our businesses hinges on the projects we pursue, the risks we take, and the ways that we deal with problems. Dale Munhall, Architect with Leo A Daly, postulates that the root cause of projects ending badly is usually a lack of actual teamwork among the owner, designers, and contractors, the seeds of which were sown by poor-quality contractual decisions made at the earliest stages of development. Dale will host an interactive workshop to address project delivery methods, QBS, and examples of successes and failures.



At the WLF on Friday, Dan Bradshaw, with Benchmark Insurance Agency, and Craig Coburn, Attorney with Richards Brandt Miller Nelson, will teach us how to better identify, evaluate, and manage professional liability risk before it becomes reality. Their session will be followed by a claims management session, moderated by John Tawresey, retired VP & CFO of KPFF, addressing what happens when risk becomes reality and your firm is presented with a professional liability claim. What should you do or not do? John will host an interactive discussion of three actual lawsuits – with the engineers that were sued and the attorneys that represented them. You will leave with lots of great advice to bring back to the office. With this new knowledge, you can improve your firm, for the benefit of all employees.

Last but not least, the Coronado Island Marriot Resort & Spa has got to be one of the best places to spend a few days working on your New Year's resolutions. The WLF will be on March 10 and 11, but our hotel discount runs from March 5 to 15. Take some extra time and enjoy the view of the San Diego skyline, take a walk on the white sandy beaches, take the trolley through Old Town, play a round of golf, take a whale watching cruise, check out the museums and gardens at Balboa Park, and finish your night in the historic Gaslamp Quarter. Visit www.ncsea.com and click on 'Meetings' for more information about the Winter Leadership Forum. Go to www.coronadovisitorcenter.com and www.sandiego.org for more information about the extracurricular activities.

I wish the best for you in 2016. I encourage you to set some New Year's resolutions – to improve yourself, to strengthen your firm, and to help other people. ■



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