

## **A Strategic Plan for Keeping Your Staff Strong**

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The PSMJ Human Resources Model™ identifies four personnel categories for A/E firms: Market Leaders, Client Leaders, Top-Notch Doers, and Everyone Else—listed below as categories A through D.

### **Who's on your team?**

- A. **Market Leaders:** These employees have sufficient stature that they control an entire market within your firm or for one of your major offices. If an A person leaves the firm, you will likely lose that market or a major portion of it.
- B. **Client Leaders:** These people control one or more key clients. If a B person leaves the firm, you will likely lose those clients or a major share of their business.
- C. **Top-notch Doers:** These are your firm's outstanding producers. When given an assignment, they do it right, on time, and under budget. They are not necessarily the most experienced people; they may be architects, junior engineers, or even administrative people who perform outstanding work.
- D. **Everyone Else:** Anyone who doesn't fall into the above A, B, or C categories is defined in our model as a D.

The A, B, and C people should be viewed as the “core staff,” to be nurtured and developed as strategic assets within the firm. The D people are in transition, either to becoming A, B, or C people or to finding employment elsewhere.

### **Get the right mix.**

In developing your human resources plan, establish consensus regarding who are your firm's As, Bs, Cs, and Ds. Then answer the following five questions:

- 1. Do you have the right mix of As, Bs, and Cs? If there is a deficit in one or more categories, how do you plan to remedy it?
- 2. How will you avoid hiring more Ds?
- 3. How do you plan to turn your existing Ds into As, Bs, or Cs? At what point will you give up trying?
- 4. How will you transition the remaining Ds out of the firm?
- 5. How will you steadily increase the number of As, Bs, and Cs in order to attract new clients and secure more of our current clients' business?

### **Keep the “goods” coming in.**

The answer to this last question is the key to your recruiting strategy. Most A/E firms mistakenly wait until they identify a specific need for people, then start looking to hire to fill the need. This reactive recruitment mode is about as effective as waiting until you run out of work before starting to market the next project.

Instead, you should ensure that you are always receiving a steady supply of high quality resumés regardless of how busy you are. The resumé supply should come from two sources: (1) newly minted graduates and (2) experienced professionals.

New graduates: PSMJ recommends that each senior staff member call one of his or her professors twice a year and ask, “Do you have any really outstanding students coming out soon?” Because your staff has established relationships with their former professors, these discussions will sidestep the usual rhetoric (“All our graduates are outstanding”) and identify the true stars.

Experienced professionals. To keep these resumés coming in, some successful firms negotiate annual agreements with professional society publications to run recruiting ads every two to three months. National firms should run their ads in national journals; regional firms, in local and state journals. These ads tend to cost less than the rates charged by most large-city newspapers. More important, you will attract a higher caliber of candidate.

### **Hire now!**

Once you start receiving high quality resumés, be aggressive with hiring decisions. Instead of worrying whether you’ll have enough work long term to support new staff, ask yourself if they will be more valuable than some of your D people.

If so, hire them. If contracts become fewer down the line, take the opportunity to transition some D people out of the company. Our studies of A/E firms have found this approach to boost morale significantly: top performers are not fond of carrying what they consider to be “dead wood.”