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Flying with Eagles:

An Interview with
David E. Thompson, P.E.,
Chairman, Haley & Aldrich

In This Issue:

Fasten Your Seatbelts...

It's going to be a bumpy ride. So as we conclude a year that has been extraordinary by any measure, let's consider what can be done to prepare for the rough patch ahead and then for 2003—when most experts believe business will bounce back.

In a word, marketers can do much for their firms (and themselves) in the next 12 to 24 months. Based on discussions with numerous industry experts and the work of various economists, forecasters, and researchers, here is a list of what we think are the most constructive initiatives marketers can launch: Accelerate business development. Focus on your best, biggest clients and prospects. Make more calls and schedule more visits. Strengthen and expand positioning and image-building programs. Migrate marketing and business development data to new, less costly e-marketing solutions. Be prudent. Zero out nonessential expenses from your FY02 marketing budget. Hone skills. Cut dead wood. Because you will need each other now more than ever, nurture professional relationships and foster esprit de corps.

Over the 30 years Dave Thompson has been with Haley & Aldrich, the estimable geotechnical and environmental engineering firm based in Boston, he has survived more than a few economic bumps in the road. As the firm's current chairman, and formerly as CEO, he knows what to do when the going gets tough. Hallmarks of his deft touch in leading a profitable, fast-growing firm: focus on clients, employees, finances, team excellence. A recent recipient of the prestigious 2001 Parcel-Sverdrup Engineering Management Award, Dave Thompson's success story is conveyed by Jean Valence in *Flying with Eagles*—our interviews with those who lead truly great firms. Herself the recipient of the 2001 SMPS Marketing Achievement Award (and president of Blackridge Ltd., management and marketing consultants based in Wellesley Hills, MA), Jean's incisive queries and thoughtful follow-ups show how easy a real pro makes it all look.

High-performing firms like Dave Thompson's are discussed by best-selling author Tom Peters in another excerpt from

our exclusive conversation that followed his opening keynote speech at the 2001 National Marketing Conference. In this one, interviewers J. Rossi, Lee Slade, and yours truly probe how Tom defines high-performing firms, what motivates him, and what he has learned in life. Nowhere else will you be able to read a more unplugged or unvarnished (though edited) Tom Peters, described by *Business Week* as business's "best friend and worst nightmare."

In closing, we salute the life of Brian J. Lewis, a respected marketer, consultant, civil engineer, former Washington state legislator, and head of Roy F. Weston Inc., who died recently at the age of 72. Always proud of his SMPS ties, he was member #44, active in national conferences, and a part of *Marketer's* extended family—whose last contribution was featured in the October 1998 issue. At the time of his death he resided in Colorado. Contributions can be made in his name to the September 11 Telethon Fund, P.O. Box 203103, Houston, TX, 77216-3103. ■



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Cover Photo: *Haley & Aldrich Chairman Dave Thompson at work.*

COVER PHOTO BY JOHN EARLE

Flying with Eagles:

An Interview with David E. Thompson, P.E., Chairman, Haley & Aldrich

At its founding in 1957, Haley & Aldrich Inc. was a pioneer in geotechnical engineering. Since then the firm has successfully evolved into a national powerhouse in underground engineering and environmental consulting services. The firm has a 450-person staff of geotechnical engineers, environmental scientists, geologists, and support personnel in 14 offices nationwide. Headquartered in Boston, the firm serves private and public clients throughout the United States and internationally. The privately held company is wholly owned and managed by senior professionals actively involved in the practice.

David Thompson is Haley & Aldrich's third leader, having served as CEO from 1989–2000 and now as Chairman. His relaxed demeanor and personal warmth belie an intense achiever who values team effectiveness. His regard for team excellence pervades his role at Haley & Aldrich, as well as his work in higher education and with professional associations.

Jean Valence, President of Blackridge Ltd., management and marketing consultants—and the 2001 SMPS Marketing Achievement Award recipient—spent time talking with Dave Thompson about the corporate culture of Haley & Aldrich and the critical factors that influence the company's growth and success.

Jean Valence (JV): The term “entrepreneur” is thrown around a lot to refer to anyone who starts a business. Were your founders really entrepreneurs, creating something original?

Dave Thompson (DT): Yes, they were. Haley & Aldrich was one of a handful of geotechnical firms founded during the 1950s. Harl Aldrich, Jim Haley, and a few others across the United States were essentially offering a new discipline as they started their companies. Geotechnical engineering was new. And they faced some real challenges.

One of them was, as a new discipline with no project track record, there was no liability insurance for geotechnical firms. Haley & Aldrich and six other pioneering firms joined together to form Terra Insurance Ltd. Haley & Aldrich is still an owner of Terra, and I sit on the Board. One of the greatest benefits is we have developed a sound loss prevention program for this engineering practice that helps to keep our clients and us out of difficulties.

JV: You have been at Haley & Aldrich for your entire career. What brought you to Haley & Aldrich originally and what has kept you here?

DT: I am a Type A personality, probably a workaholic. Throughout my life I have been, perhaps to a fault, driven to excel. After graduate school, I wanted to work for the best outfit I could find. I looked around, discovered Haley & Aldrich, thought this place was the best, and so I wanted to come here. I wouldn't be here today if I didn't still think this is the best. It matters to me that, when I go into a meeting and say I am from Haley & Aldrich, people listen. The Haley & Aldrich label means suddenly you are talking at a high level.

JV: Tell me a little more about that label.

DT: We strive to differentiate ourselves by being the best and exceeding our clients' expectations. We track what our competitors are doing, but we don't measure our performance in terms of theirs. Instead, we build our services around what clients tell us they need and value. Then, we benchmark ourselves around our own success at responding to clients. And we are always trying to raise the bar for ourselves, to do a better job serving clients than we ever have before.

JV: So basically, Haley & Aldrich competes with itself?

DT: That's right. Striving for excellence is ingrained in everything we do. It affects the type of work we do and allows us to help our clients with their most complicated projects. To do that kind of challenging work, we have to attract and keep the best people. And we have to pay them well. This drives our financial position in many ways.

Geotechnical engineering has matured, and there are a lot of local and regional firms in the national marketplace. But the kind of jobs we get brought into by our private clients and the A/E primes with large public jobs are the projects that require our specialty staff capabilities, like tunnel engineering and ground improvement. So we don't try to compete on price.

JV: Your client list includes large public agencies as well as private-sector clients. How can firms like yours, much of whose work is composed of small projects, deal with the fee constraints of the public sector?

DT: In my career I have invested thousands of hours in explaining to clients why a specialty service firm's overhead is larger than they are accustomed to seeing from traditional engineering companies. Our clients sometimes relate to us as a big firm, but we have an overhead structure that doesn't look like big firms. We don't do \$5 million jobs; we do lots of \$30,000 jobs. When we talk to a new public-sector client or a major industrial client about our overhead structure, the client is surprised. Haley & Aldrich's ability to win large public-sector projects, like Boston's Central Artery, requires knowledgeable clients, and it is up to us to provide information.

JV: I've seen a copy of Haley & Aldrich's Company Charter, which is impressive in both its focus and its brevity. What is behind the charter and how has it benefited the firm?

DT: The charter was formed in our most recent strategic planning process in 1997. It includes five things: our vision, mission, critical success factors, guiding principles, and a code of behavior.

Our mission "to be an integrated company focused on national and local client needs and business objectives" supports the vision: "Creative solutions for client success."

We identified three critical factors to our success, and they serve as focus points and measurement instruments: financial success, client relationships, and employee development.

Content aside, the most important aspect of that effort four years ago is that the charter was built on consensus. We invested a lot of time to create our charter from the bottom up. Many Haley & Aldrich leaders and staff members came together through focus groups and working sessions in the strategic planning process, and the team who crafted the



PHOTO BY CHRISTOPHER BARNES

During Thompson's tenure as CEO, Haley & Aldrich has played a major role in underground engineering for Boston's Central Artery/Tunnel Project (CA/T), the largest transportation project in the United States. The firm advanced innovative applications of foundation systems and tunnel engineering to meet the extraordinary engineering challenges of the design and construction of this 7.5-mile, 10-lane highway through the heart of downtown Boston. Thompson has given technical presentations to professional societies and educational institutions throughout the country on the project's significance to the future of underground engineering in transportation.

Company Charter interpreted their thinking. The benefit of the process is that the product is perceived as the company's charter rather than management's. As a result, people refer to the charter all the time. When new staff is brought into the firm, they are introduced to it. Training programs reinforce it. The annual "State of Haley & Aldrich" address, broadcast throughout the firm, is organized around it. It is part of our culture.

JV: What role has strategic planning played in promoting the firm's culture and organizational change?

DT: Our basic values haven't changed since the firm's founding. A core value is the theme stated in the charter's

vision: "Creative solutions for client success." That theme makes our focus on technical innovation and excellence subject to success as defined by our clients. While we have always been passionate about client service, this more outward focus makes clear the reasons for continuing organizational change. Listening to clients has driven our service market diversification as we have added to our specialty service offerings. A good example was meeting the needs of our developer clients back in the '80s with environmental compliance services. Later in the '90s, our major industrial clients called for innovative remedial design and for environmental health and safety management services. Our environmental practice grew quickly from less than 10% to 50% of our revenues during this period.

We have taken strategic planning seriously since we began holding retreats in the early '70s. In 1968, when I joined Haley & Aldrich, we had 16 employees. We now have 14 offices and 450 staff members. Significant growth occurred as a result of decisions made at our 1990 retreat. At that point, we chose a geographic diversification strategy to shift from being so heavily reliant on the northeastern economy and moved from being a Boston firm with northeastern branch offices to being a national firm with offices in multiple states. Now, 35% of our revenue is generated outside of the Northeast.

JV: You are credited with leading Haley & Aldrich's substantial growth in the '90s and, as CEO, personally spearheading the initiative that resulted in five mergers and acquisitions. What was your strategy for ensuring that Haley & Aldrich's powerful culture could be transferred to, and perpetuated in, these new offices?

DT: Planning and managing our growth has always been a team effort. And, yes, much of our growth is through mergers and acquisitions, though we also have grown organically in our New England locations to serve the booming real estate market in this region. One of the best ways to foster the Haley & Aldrich culture is through "cultural implants," moving experienced staff to each new location in a permanent position. We routinely swap technical staff for project assignments, so people come to Boston or other offices for a month or so, and return knowing substantially more about their peers and about Haley & Aldrich.

Our Senior Vice President for Marketing and Strategic Planning, Sylvia Wheeler, works with the Board in developing the strategic planning process and implementation strategies. Marketing planning and BD team activities help to engage staff in the new offices in cross-office business development and in taking part in marketing visibility efforts.

Another powerful tool in integrating Haley & Aldrich people across the country is our electronic infrastructure. All marketing qualifications materials, our project and contact database, policies, reference materials, and an array of licensed technical software are available to everyone through our intranet, and people access it all the time. A brief internal e-mail, "Who knows something about...?" pinpoints excellent resources and generates vast amounts of information quickly. And with this technology, our offices work more efficiently with corporate marketing to develop quality SOQs and proposals they can produce locally. This capacity has helped us share client relationships built with national A/E/C primes and our major industrial clients.

Training programs are a third vehicle for extending and transferring Haley & Aldrich's culture to new staff members. We just completed a program for project managers on financial management. The program was conducted on a regional basis and involved more than 200 employees across the company. There is no substitute for people sitting next to each other talking about good practices.

JV: Training and staff development seem to be taken seriously here.

DT: Employee development is one of our three critical success factors, and we measure it in a number of ways. Retention is one. Our goal for staff retention is 90%, and we achieve this. People with 20-30 years with us are not unusual. But we are not just a lot of gray-hairs. Last year we hired 100 people, and our population is diverse.


	
BUSINESS FACTS	
Headquarters Location:	Boston, MA
Number of Offices:	14
Total Staff:	465
Marketing Staff:	9
Gross Fees in 1995:	\$34 million
Gross Fees in 2000:	\$59 million
Projected Gross Fees in 2005:	\$100 million (goal)
Technology Budget in 1995:	\$.6 million
Technology Budget in 2000:	\$2.3 million
Projected Technology Budget in 2005:	\$4 million
Percent of Gross Revenue Allocated to Marketing:	4%
Web Address:	www.HaleyAldrich.com



PHOTO BY LOGAN SEAL

David E. Thompson, P.E., Chairman of Haley & Aldrich

Another way we measure success in employee development is through questionnaires. We survey staff every year to find out what they think of our work environment, and use that input to make changes. Employee satisfaction is important to us.

JV: How do you enhance employee satisfaction?

DT: Our staff thrives on technical challenge. We must offer them interesting project and client opportunities. As part of their career advancement, we set out clear expectations for their role in building long-term client relationships and contributing to the profitable growth and marketing efforts of the firm. We know the people we invest in will be here for the long haul. Their relationships are our future. For the kind of people we want, satisfying clients is paramount to their work satisfaction. So building their ability to work effectively in service delivery and business development teams is key. I believe our people are personally motivated to do the best possible job for their clients, and it's the job of management to facilitate their efforts with systems and resources that support their project work.

JV: We have used the word "best" a lot. Having so many excellent staff members dealing with many challenging projects and serving a lot of prestigious clients, how do

you make sure that staff members don't start competing with each other?

DT: In hiring the best of the best, we specifically look for people who like to be part of a winning team. That having been said, intensity is rampant. Competitive spirit is valued, and when you are dealing with peak performers, it's inevitable. But internal competition is not welcome at Haley & Aldrich.

JV: How do you thwart it?

DT: We don't. Instead of trying to stamp it out, we make sure we don't support it. We want people to work cooperatively in an environment of mutual respect. Our systems don't reinforce or reward internal competition. While we certainly value individual initiative, team effort is important to us and is rewarded with systems that request, require, and reinforce teamwork.

JV: For example . . .

DT: For example, Haley & Aldrich does not reward an individual's sales effectiveness. Instead, we reward team-based sales. Our entire marketing and business development process is based on the team concept, not on creating stars whom everyone relies on to feed them work.

JV: Once you successfully recruit a star, that person always wants to be with the best. How do you keep stars?

DT: Lots of people here are top-notch in what they do, and I think, for many, that's exactly why they do stay. We have to make sure everyone in this firm feels valuable. As we discussed, 80% of the battle is winning exciting work. Recognition is also important. In addition, at Haley & Aldrich ownership participation is available.

Becoming a shareholder of Haley & Aldrich is a reward for excellent performance. We are employee-owned. No large firm or outsider has an equity interest in the firm. Associates and Senior Associates are offered stock options, increasing their ability to invest in the firm and achieve a return on their investment. Of our 450 employees, about 75 are shareholders.

Being a shareholder also involves continually meeting the expectations of the position. We have an annual goal-setting process, peer coaching program, performance self-assessment, and peer feedback processes that work together towards aligning each shareholder's activities with the company's strategic goals. The process is intended to support the success of the individual and at the same time communicate how someone can best contribute to meeting the company's Critical Success Factors.

Many stars and emerging stars are leaders on our marketing and business development teams. Business development is primarily the responsibility of our technical professionals.

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Selling in Deep Carpet: Building Strong Client Relationships Through Debriefings

As marketing professionals, we may profess to understand our clients' needs and perhaps those of prospects. However, if we fail to ask these people directly, we miss opportunities to establish clearer communication, learn client standards of quality, improve service, and develop a favorable image for ourselves. When we seize these opportunities and act on the information we gain, we nurture positive long-term relationships with clients and capture both repeat business and strong referrals to make our work enjoyable as well as profitable.

We invest in these relationships by conducting debriefing interviews—also called client reviews. In these private meetings, we learn the clients' impressions of our proposals (and performance in the case of long-standing clients) as well as their perceptions of our image and reputation. When they are well planned and executed, these interviews demonstrate our sincere interest in clients and prospects and assure credible technical work by removing assumptions.

Firms commonly develop proposals based on an appraisal of the fit between their skills and the needs of the client or prospective client. Debriefing interviews are a smart way to increase the proposal hit rate. Debriefings are appropriate at any of three stages in the proposal consideration process: before any decision has been reached, after a favorable decision, and after an unfavorable decision. Debriefings may also be held during projects, immediately after projects, and between projects. The purpose is always the same: to elicit constructive feedback and reinforce positive regard.

Information to Be Gained

A debriefing interview establishes a time to talk privately with a client or prospective client. The critical task of the interviewer is to pose open-ended questions in a manner that encourages complete answers from the client, especially regarding expectations about process and outcome. All marketing professionals advocate quality products and

excellent service but to achieve client satisfaction, we must allow clients to confirm their definition of quality. We may then fulfill their needs better than the competition and secure ongoing business.

This discussion also gives clients an opportunity to make special requests about the project at hand. Such new or updated information about a project or an untapped market may provide an important competitive edge.

The client's message may contain more than just the technical or unique aspects of the project. It may spell out the types of working relationships desired among team members and other consultants on the project. Plans for ongoing communication or reporting throughout the project should be noted and followed.

As ongoing, honest communication is developing, a debriefing may be the occasion for a firm to learn of a specific dissatisfaction that has not been previously expressed by a client. Once aware of the problem, the firm is usually able to fully resolve the difficulty and restore its client's trust. When such communication continues, loyalty develops and becomes the basis for repeat business and a solid reputation.

Advance Marketing

Before a sharpshooter takes aim, he or she sizes up the target and proceeds only after taking into consideration a multitude of factors that will affect the likelihood of

“Client debriefings demonstrate our sincere interest in clients and assure credible technical work by removing assumptions.”

success. Similarly, we have an opportunity to increase our success rate when we first assess our target clients, then create a strategy to satisfy their needs.

A debriefing may be held with potential clients *prior* to their putting a project out to bid or publishing an RFP or seeking sole-source work. This meeting is an informal introduction of our services and interest. We discuss the clients' needs and interests while listening for their expectations and values; we may casually present our qualifications, especially pointing out where our skills and experience meet their criteria. We may then learn how to position our services in a future proposal and increase the effectiveness of its presentation.

A Proposal Under Consideration

We may ask to speak with a prospective client after submitting a proposal, before a decision is made. This contact, whether as a meeting or a telephone discussion, is to emphasize our interest, to find out whether anything further is desired from us, and to clarify when to expect the next step in the decision-making process.

An Accepted Proposal

The opportunity to debrief after winning a new project is often lost in the excitement of the victory. However, it is an important chance to ask why your proposal was selected. Hearing what the client valued about the proposal and its presentation, as well as the client's perception of a firm's professional reputation, allows for more meaningful differentiation from the competition.

Debriefing also clarifies the client's expectations from the start of the project and reveals if anything has changed from the initial parameters. Gathering such information for the strategic planning of the project gets the working relationship off on the right foot and avoids potential misunderstandings. This concerted

display of interest demonstrates a willingness to work cooperatively and opens channels for further communication. It is also an opportunity for the client to clarify the level and amount of communication desired, which is important in developing compatibility and trust.

Because acting upon what is learned is imperative to a successful debriefing, the debriefing of an accepted proposal probably should be conducted by the project manager or principal-in-charge, someone with the authority to implement the client's instructions. This person also must make certain the information gained from the debriefing is passed along to everyone who works on the project. When all team members know what the client expects, the project will progress more smoothly and the client will receive the work proposed by the firm selected.

A Rejected Proposal

A debriefing interview after a proposal has been turned down is not a time to defensively argue the decision. Rather,

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Compelling Communications: Magic Phrases to Use and Deadly Gaffes to Avoid with the Media

“How can I help you?”

Those are the five magic words you should ask every media person you meet. As a former newspaper editor, I can assure you almost no one asks that question. Instead, people who want stories written about them—even PR and marketing people—mistakenly beg, plead, grovel, cajole, and make pests out of themselves. To get in the media’s good graces, here are magic phrases you can use if you have a reporter on the phone, or you are writing a pitch letter to an editor.

“I can provide other sources for your story.”

Reporters love this because they don’t have to work hard tracking down other people for multiple-source stories. Sometimes this is the only way you will be mentioned in a story.

“When is your deadline?”

This shows you are respectful of their time. It also gives you a good idea of how quickly you might have to provide the information the reporter is seeking.

“Please call on me for other story ideas on this topic.”

Reporters and editors will welcome this, and they will probably take you up on your offer.

“What other information are you looking for?”

If you can lead the reporter in the right direction, you’ll earn valuable brownie points.

“I have written material I can provide.”

Reporters often appreciate having information in writing so they can refer to it later. It also helps improve accuracy.

“I can provide graphic illustrations you might want to consider to accompany your story.”

Print media like things such as maps, pie charts, illustrations, and other graphics. You will save them valuable time if you can provide these.

“Would you like me to send a media kit so you can review it before the interview?”

This is a thoughtful gesture. It helps reporters prepare.

“Would you like me to provide a list of questions you can ask me?”

Ask this question only of broadcast media such as radio talk show hosts. Never ask print media if they need questions to ask you or they will be insulted.

Here are other tips for staying off the media’s enemies list:

- After an interview, don’t ask the reporter if you can read the story before it goes into the paper or magazine. The answer will be no—at least from any reputable publication.
- Don’t come back after the interview and ask the reporter to remove certain sensitive quotes and other information you gave on the record. It may result in bad feelings, distrust, and eventually end what could have been a good relationship.
- Don’t give an editor or reporter the idea they are getting an exclusive, when in fact you already talked to a reporter at another publication who was interested in your story.
- Don’t agree to be interviewed and then cancel because you change your mind. The reporter will never call you again.

Use the magic phrases, avoid the landmines, and you are well on your way to establishing valuable media relationships that can lead to lots of free publicity. ■



About the Author

Joan Stewart is a media relations speaker, trainer, and consultant who publishes “The Publicity Hound’s Tips of the Week,” a free weekly e-zine. Sign up at her web site at www.PublicityHound.com and receive free, by autoresponder,

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Sylvia S. Cutler
Bookstore Manager
sylvia@smps.org
December 2001

At a crossroads? Check your career options!

Everyone, at some point in his/her life, will reach a crossroads, a point where some decision must be made. Go this way? Go that way? Most of us believe if we walk around one side of the block on the way to work, certain things will happen that would be different if we walked in the other direction. Haven't there been books written about alternate realities? Yes, a decision can change your life, especially when it deals with your career. You will find any number of new book titles that will help you make better decisions about your jobs, entrepreneurial opportunities, and how to enhance your value, and how to avoid the pitfalls of downsampling.

Building Your Career
223 pp, 2001. Paper. How are you building and what kind of "return" are you getting? How can you increase your career wealth and meet your goals?

Charting Your Career in the 21st Century
Professional Services. Sally Han... #M374, \$29 member... on the threshold of new... understand the realities... defined, how titles, re... book is an analysis of... career, what kinds of... need. In addition, in... average resume. The job descriptions in this book will give you a good idea of what that resume should look like.

Firing Back: Power Strategies for Cutting the Best Deal When You're About to Lose Your Job.
Jodie-Beth Galos, Sandy McIntosh, Ph.D. Paper. 226 pp, 1997. #MBS-214, \$26, \$4 s/h. Layoffs are inevitable, especially when the economy is down and large companies are downsizing. Or perhaps there's new management and they're using the clean-sweep technique to clear the decks and make room for their favorite people. If you see this coming, this is the book that will help you negotiate a better termination deal than you could possibly do on your own.

Jobwise: 150 Tips to Help You Survive and Thrive in Your Career. Steve Klein. Paper. 155 pp, 2000. #MBS-212, \$20, \$4 s/h. This gives you a new perspective

on what you're actually doing, and whether or not you could be doing it better. Before you spend another day "just muddling through," read this outstanding book on attitudes, performance, how to come across to your boss and co-workers as an essential contributor to the welfare of the workplace.

Navigating Your Career in 21 of America's Leading
... Done. Christopher W... pp, 1999. #MBS-211, ...—the ones who go from... is offered, and having... how many jobs of short... not you. You know where... e, don't you? However,

Interviewing and Salary
... per. 221 pp, 1995. ... come a long way, but ... in some fields men ... salaries. This book will ... in the interview process, ... respective employers, and ... even in a tight market.

Complete Checkup and
... 174 pp, 2000. Paper. #MBS-210, \$27, \$4 s/h. Have you had a physical lately? Do you know how you're doing? Since your career is a major part of your life, it needs a checkup, too. This book is designed to help you take a good hard look at what you've accomplished so far, helping you evaluate your work, how you feel about it, if you're utilizing the job's full potential, what you'd rather be doing, what you need to do to get where you want to go, how to assess your career strength, where your greatest strengths are and how to use them, and what you should do next.

Check out SMPS's outstanding job bank at www.smps.org.



To place an order, call 800-292-7677 or visit www.smps.org for an order form. Fax your order with Visa, Mastercard, or American Express to 703-549-2498.

Unplugged:

Conversations with Tom Peters (Part II)

Here is the second of several excerpts from an hour of unvarnished conversation with best-selling author Tom Peters that followed his keynote address to the 2001 SMPS National Marketing Conference in which he spoke about many things including how A/E/C firms need to recruit and retain talented individuals, and whether pharmaceutical giant Pfizer could attract a truly extraordinary man such as J. Craig Venter (president of Celera Genomics and TIME's "Person of the Year" in 2000).

Randy Pollock: We all aspire to be in high-performing companies. All the people who showed up for your speech are interested in being better and doing better by their firms. What are the metrics or criteria that are important in determining whether a firm is headed in the right direction?

Tom Peters: I'd go back to that "Would Craig Venter come to work at Pfizer?" comment. Let's say that the four of us could come to a consensus as to who was the most interesting person in a particular engineering class out of Rice University or someplace like that. The next Michael Dell or Ross Perot. Would that person go to work for my firm, and stay there?

But I'll even take the "go there," for starters. Will this young woman or young man see this as a really cool place to do business? Again, it goes back to why aren't these people at my seminars? To me, the A/E/C industry seems—and maybe it's because of construction in my genes—to be such a cool industry and such a fabulous playground. So why?

Talent would be one. Let's take A/E/C or the A/E part as relatively small businesses, and I don't mean to equate you guys to car dealers, but when I talk to car dealers who are businessmen running sizeable businesses,

I always say, "Why can't you attract the top talent?"—because in most towns of under 40,000, the car dealers are the biggest game in town, and why wouldn't a really cool kid who had an MBA from Duke want to go to work for a car dealer? As we all know from *The Millionaire Next Door*, he's the millionaire next door, not the vice president of a division at Coca Cola. So talent is first and foremost.

The second thing that is key to me—and I am thinking back on this comment a fellow made to me after a speech—is "When I'm going through these mergers and I end up with an 800-engineer firm or something like that, how can we do relatively small projects that will drag us into the future?" Because you get into that arm-lock. You know, "I've got a thousand mouths to feed, and I'm only going to feed a thousand mouths if I'm doing the next



Tom Peters works the crowd at the SMPS 2001 National Marketing Conference in Orlando.

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baseball stadium, or doing the next 'whatever' plant or the next high-rise or what have you."

Indeed, we can experiment a lot on those big projects, but what we need is weird, middle-sized clients who will "screw around" with us. We need weird, interesting people who want to screw around, and we need weird, interesting projects with weird, interesting clients where we can do that.

I had another fellow who's thinking exactly that way (I've forgotten the firm, but one of the big engineering firms he's just taken over), and that's what he was saying. He was trying to figure out how to deconstruct it and get more energy into it. And I don't know what engineering schools are turning out, but maybe we shouldn't be hiring IT (information technology) people from civil engineering and mechanical engineering backgrounds; we ought to see if we can compete with the Dells to pull the best people out of the computer science courses, because I think IT is going to be it for A/E/C over the next 20 years—and I think that's the revolution in-waiting.

For example, I just happened to follow it a little bit, because they're practically neighbors: BuzzSaw.com lost a ton of money and now AutoDesk has bought them back, but the BuzzSaw.com kind of idea is going to catch hold, and that's kind of my VC thing. You in this industry don't really have natural venture capitalists, to the best of my knowledge; you've got a lot of money, but it's not that kind of money. If I were Bill Gates, and I was fascinated by the construction industry and I had two billion dollars burning a hole in my pocket, I'd love to have a \$100 million fund that focused on the construction industry.

Lee Slade: You would invest in the A/E/C funds?

Tom Peters: Yeah. It would be fascinating. Maybe what I would do is my own version of BuzzSaw.com. I would invest in the infrastructure providers where there is money that could pull the A/E/Cs into a more progressive stance.

J. Rossi: What motivates you?

Tom Peters: Bob Waterman, my co-author of *In Search of Excellence*, got it right years ago in an interview when he said something like, "Tom Peters is not really happy unless he's pissed off about something." And I go on "pissed-off" searches that tend to last for a couple of years. The design thing is one, the women thing is another.

If you really look at my flow of presentations, I don't particularly fit into it in a neat fashion. I'll just trip over something like this—like the world's largest marketing opportunity called "women," and nobody's doing anything

with it; and you know, I'm not driven by wanting to be Martin Luther King—but I am driven by things that are just plain DUMB. They get to me, to the degree to which we haven't used design effectively at least in the manufacturing and service arenas as a tool. The women's thing is incredibly stupid. I'm motivated by passions for big opportunities being hopelessly underserved.

***"If I were Bill Gates ...
I'd love to have a \$100
million fund that
focused on the
construction industry."***

J. Rossi: What's the biggest lesson you've learned in life?

Tom Peters: I know the answer is choosing the right mother. Toastmasters, I think, or somebody, gave me some huge speaking award a few years ago, and I know they were pissed off, because it was a serious

ceremony, and I was supposed to give a speech on giving speeches, in which I've had no training whatsoever, and I said to choose the right mom. My mother...I described her as: in a ten-floor elevator ride, she can make seven friends for life. She is the world's most gregarious human being, and so she passed that on. I don't know...maybe the most important thing to me is what would not necessarily make me a success in the A/E/C business or many other businesses, and that is: short attention span, but incredible passion for what I'm doing. Maybe you could say excellence, but I don't really think so. Again, I flatter myself.

Of all of these people that have this "management/guru" label, I think it's almost fair to say that Peter Drucker and I are the only two who you can't fit into a category. I'm not a quality guy. I'm not a leadership guy. I'm not a reengineering guy. I'm not a customer service guy. I'm a "what the hell are you?" guy. ■

About the Interviewers

J. Rossi is vice president of marketing/communications for Charlotte-based HLM Design (www.hlmdesign.com), a publicly traded architecture and engineering services company, and can be reached by phone at 610-566-2958. **Lee Slade, P.E.**, is a senior principal and executive director of structural engineering services and **Randle Pollock, FSMPS**, is principal in charge of marketing for Houston-based Walter P. Moore (www.walterpmoore.com), engineers and consultants, at telephone 713-630-7300.

Classifieds

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Marketing Coordinator, Torrance, CA

Award-winning architectural planning firm specializing in health care and higher education planning and architecture seeks a marketing coordinator to assist in preparing proposals, creating marketing literature, developing strategic relationships, maintaining web site, attending conventions, and working with principals to identify targeted marketing to identified opportunities. This individual should have significant previous experience in an A/E environment, preferably with a firm specializing in health care or higher education. Forward resumes to mail@hkaarch.com.

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Marketing Intern, Torrance, CA

Award-winning architectural planning firm located in Torrance seeks a marketing intern to assist marketing coordinator in developing marketing literature, preparing proposals, attending conferences, and communicating with clients. Individual should be experienced with desktop publishing software and have good communications skills. Knowledge or interest in architecture or planning is desirable. May be part-time or full-time. Forward resumes to mail@hkaarch.com.

Business Development Executive, Northern New Jersey

Langan is a 350-person professional consulting firm with 7 East Coast offices, offering multi-disciplined engineering and environmental capabilities. Our superb reputation of technical excellence and client responsiveness has created a track record of consistent growth. If you have 10 years of relevant experience and bring a winning attitude, integrated BD/marketing talents, relationship building skills, and the desire to work hard and lead, there is a spot for you on our team in our corporate office in Northern New Jersey. For immediate consideration in utmost confidence, fax or e-mail your professional profile to:

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Nodarse & Associates Inc., a 140+ person geotechnical, environmental, and construction materials testing firm seeks an assertive, well-spoken BD person. Position includes identifying markets, generating leads, follow-up, developing client relationships, minimal proposal preparation. Will work collaboratively with the Corporate Business Development Director and West Palm Beach Branch Manager. Private-sector relationships in South Florida a plus. Excellent writing skills a must. Minimum five years' A/E/C experience. Woman-owned business. Great atmosphere and benefits.

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Vice President, Business Development Director
Nodarse & Associates, Inc.
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Phone: (407) 740-6110
Fax: (407) 740-6112

■ Selling in Deep Carpet
continued from page 9

the meeting is an opportunity for soliciting and accepting beneficial feedback from the client. Being given undivided attention impresses upon clients a firm's sincere desire to learn from an honest assessment of its performance.

To be constructive, the debriefing session must be conducted as objectively as possible. It is perfectly appropriate to express disappointment at not getting the project and appreciation for the meeting as a chance to increase understanding of the client's needs. Resist the temptation to make another presentation, to clarify or add points that may have been unclear or omitted; focus on the future rather than the past. To lower any defensiveness on either side, maintain a positive attitude. For example, consider asking, "What made the winners win?" rather than, "Why did we lose?"

The client may offer compliments on aspects of your firm's proposal or presentation; accept them graciously without downplaying the efforts made, then note them to share later with other members of the firm as a morale booster following this loss.

Work to establish and maintain rapport. Rapport is built on the ability to convey empathy and understanding without judgment. Throughout the interview, tacitly show that the knowledge, experiences, attitudes, and feelings being shared are important, yet no judgment is being passed on the content of what is expressed. Control personal reactions (frowning, head shaking) to ease the client's delivery of sensitive information.

Phrase carefully prepared questions in a manner that encourages a client to answer candidly. Demonstrate active listening (eye contact, head nodding) and summarize major points. Work hard to gain as much information from the potential client as possible.

Close with an optimistic discussion of future work. However, refrain from launching into a sales pitch. Some clients perceive future-oriented talk as too aggressive, so keep the conversation focused on improving future performance and becoming better prepared to meet anticipated needs.

Before leaving, establish how to best stay in contact (how frequently and in what manner—telephone call, appointment, conversation at a professional meeting). Depart with confidence to leave behind a positive impression.

An Ongoing Project

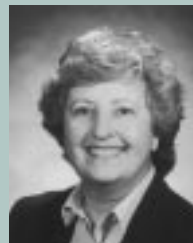
Regular communication throughout a project is perhaps the most important key to a successful outcome. Research conducted by the author indicates that all too often clients fail to hire firms a second time not for technical reasons but for subjective ones. Debriefings provide a qualitative measure of a firm's performance to complement the quantitative measures of the project's progress. When conducted regularly, debriefings become increasingly beneficial, just as exercising a muscle regularly makes it stronger and more capable with less effort.

Debriefings of ongoing projects should address four key areas: technical competence, communication, working relationship, and future opportunities. Apart from noting progress, a firm should ask about technical competence to discern whether it is undervaluing its services or overestimating its skills. The frequency and means of communication should be reviewed for effectiveness. Are people receiving the information they need in a timely manner? The working relationship should be assessed for efficiency; duplication of effort is one symptom of a poor working relationship. An ideal situation is one of synergy, where the two firms working together produce results greater than the sum of the results achieved by the firms working individually. Future opportunities may evolve out of present projects or anticipated growth in other areas and may be easily discussed if communication has been open thus far.

Keep in mind that different people working on the project will have different perspectives on a firm's working relationship with the client. For example, an outside consultant conducting debriefings will elicit different information than a team member. A project manager will interpret information differently than a marketing professional. This is desirable because the variety serves to widen the view. Remember, we interview people to find out from them those things we cannot directly observe. Debriefing as a process begins with the assumption that the perspective of others is meaningful when allowed to be communicated clearly. Consider carefully whom to involve in the debriefing meetings, then contact them regularly. Major clients should be interviewed at least once a year to discuss the "big picture" aspects of the working relationship as an adjunct to weekly job meetings that tend to focus on day-to-day activities and technical considerations.

In the next issue, more detail will be provided about the value of building positive client relationships through debriefing. ■

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About the Author
Nadine R. Yates, FSMPS, is principal of N.R. Yates and Associates, a strategic marketing and management consulting firm based in Maynard, MA. She has been researching debriefing interviews since 1987 and has conducted hundreds on behalf of clients. Nadine can be reached by phone at 978-897-0474 or by e-mail at nrya@aol.com.

■ Flying with Eagles
continued from page 7

As I indicated, the expectations for career advancement and ownership do include team measurements in these areas.

JV: Now that we are on the subject of Market Area Teams, what is Haley & Aldrich's approach to marketing, and what is your basic marketing structure?

DT: As a result of our strategic planning process, we overlaid our service offerings and geographic markets within a framework of client-focused Market Area Teams. There are three at this time: Infrastructure, Real Estate Development, and Industrial Environmental. Organizing around our traditional client types, rather than by geography or services, reinforces our client focus in business development and service delivery. Our corporate marketing group supports all the market areas in strategic marketing planning, marketing communications, and research. And in some cases, teams have dedicated business development specialists.

The idea is to leverage our strong client relationships across offices and transfer our specialty staff experience gained on major projects mostly in the Northeast to serve our existing clients' needs throughout the United States. This positioning strategy has been successful in our industrial sector where we serve Fortune 100 clients like Xerox Corporation, General Motors, The Boeing Company, and Textron in multiple U.S. locations. Our infrastructure work also has been growing in many states in addition to our office locations. And we are providing integrated environmental and geotechnical services for real estate projects with industrial clients and developers we think will bring our strong reputation in the Northeast to other targeted regions. We also are growing our staff in a number of office locations.

JV: What does that mean in terms of business development?

DT: In 1997, we refined the concept of business development leadership teams. Each Market Area has a leadership team of two or three senior technical professionals who are fundamentally either BD initiators or closers. They serve as role models and orchestrators for the BD efforts of the entire team, which includes others involved in active marketing across our offices.

Our business model requires project managers who are able to be seller-doers, so most of our professionals are actively involved in the BD process. But those involved in BD teams are willing to take on more of an initiator role (identifying prospects and building new relationships) and/or the closer role (key technical leaders who will help close the sale and assist the project or staff manager in service delivery).

JV: So finding business developers is not a challenge for Haley & Aldrich?



Dave Thompson and Haley & Aldrich staff members participate in the Corporate Challenge Road Race

DT: We actually have a different challenge. At Haley & Aldrich, for everyone who serves as a business development leader, we need two or three people who are very good project managers and technical experts. We need people who can deal with state-of-the-art technical issues. Many of these people may not have an inkling about how to schmooze with a client. That technical expert has to be made to feel as valued in the company as the people who develop client relationships. That is the real challenge here.

JV: You've indicated that Haley & Aldrich employees, including you, are peak performers who are focused on doing their best. You've also said that consensus, team dynamism, and mutual respect are all important at the firm. Where does leadership come in?

DT: The founders of this firm were strong people. Harl Aldrich, in particular, is an extraordinary person, a visionary, and a leader. There is not another like him in the world. He set the standards of the firm at the start in 1957, and those standards are imbedded in the Company Charter that guides our course today.

In the early '80s, Harl led us through ownership transition planning. As a result, the leadership of the firm has never been vested in one person. Leadership here is an amalgamation. No one person can claim responsibility for the success for the firm, but together we can claim a lot of success.

For us, leadership begins with an understanding of each other's strengths and weaknesses. We work together to put everyone in a position in which that person's strengths are paramount. When we look for future leaders, we find people who have special talents that can be combined with other's distinct abilities to create a whole. Thanks to this approach, ownership transition here is taken in stride and is as smooth as it can be.

Harl, always a statesman, held a vision for our company that it would not only survive his leaving but also prosper through strong leadership and shared ownership. That has happened. Our fourth President/CEO, Bruce Beverly, assumed the role last December. Bruce, like me, has spent his entire professional career at Haley & Aldrich. He continues to reach out to embrace the best practices and organizational change that will take us to the next level in our mission of becoming a more nationally positioned firm. We have been extremely successful in the past few years; our revenue growth this year will be about 28%.

JV: Haley & Aldrich has a history of developing staff over the years, encouraging career paths within the organization, and promoting from within. How do you ensure that innovation and change are welcome and well received? How is it possible to be both venerable and cutting edge at the same time?

DT: The nature of our business demands innovation, and the nature of smart, technically qualified people is to be innovative. Every project we do requires imagination and individual thought processes to address every problem. And virtually every problem has a different solution, because it is our job to figure out a better way to do things, rather than simply respond in cookie-cutter form. Our disciplines demand flexibility and adaptability. Because we are close to the construction end of things, we learn about new technologies, like those from Japan and Europe, which constantly influence solutions. In our environmental practice, we have been fortunate to work with major industrial clients who have engaged us in the development and application of new environmental investigation and remedial technologies as well.

It is exciting and rewarding to be on the cutting edge of projects, using new technologies that did not exist five years ago. It's also a marketing advantage when we can cite project experience in techniques clients haven't heard of yet.

The firm's real challenge is to support our employees' innovation. We try to do so through the establishment of specific internal programs and services. For example, when someone has a good idea and needs to do some research, our strategic budget provides the resources to allow that person to pursue that initiative.

JV: From my research I've learned you were captain of the football and track teams and an All-American when you were at Tufts University. And later, in the Marines, you were

captain of a team composed of 10 other All-Americans. Your focus on teamwork seems to be a lifetime commitment. How do you think competition fits in with teamwork?

DT: I still love sports and competition. Running in road races and competing with other firms in an annual canoe race on the Charles River is a good way to play out the competitive spirit and have fun. If you like and respect the people you work with, you enjoy spending time with them both inside and outside of the office. Teamwork is like that.

The same applies to participation in professional organizations, which is emphasized a lot here. We may compete in business, but involvement in professional organizations is where we can have fun and contribute to the advancement of the profession at the same time. I enjoy my roles in professional societies and encourage our staff to take leadership positions as part of their career development.

JV: As Chairman of the Board, how do you stay engaged in the firm and in the profession?

DT: About a third of my time is spent on management responsibilities. Another third is chargeable to projects—that is one way I stay in touch with clients and with Haley & Aldrich staff. Project work also keeps me aware of how our systems are working.

The final third might be called Haley & Aldrich image reinforcement to the outside world. I teach a course at Tufts University on behalf of the Institute for Professional Practice. IPP's goal is to educate young professionals about the non-technical aspects of practice, such as ethics, legal issues, financial management, profitability, marketing, and the business environment. I consider that kind of information sharing, even with only 30 students at a time, to be the best possible use of my time and an investment in the profession. Topics like qualifications-based selection are news to them, and they need to understand that building a relationship with a client is better for the client than competing on price. When students are finished with the course, they know life is more than what is in that computer. ■



About the Interviewer
Jean R. Valence, FSMPS, is President of Blackridge Ltd. (www.blackridge.com), management and marketing consultants based in Wellesley Hills, MA, assisting design and construction firms in ownership

transition, practice management and assessment, marketing planning, client satisfaction surveys, and human resource strategies. A past SMPS National Treasurer and Regional Director, Jean can be reached at 602-955-1114 or valence@blackridge.com.

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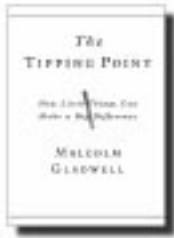
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Bookshelf:

The Tipping Point



***The Tipping Point:
How Little Things Can Make a
Big Difference***

By Malcolm Gladwell
Boston: Little, Brown and Company,
2000. 279 pages; hardback, \$24.95.

In *The Tipping Point*, Malcolm Gladwell challenges our conventional notions of marketing with a “guerrilla” theory: Small investments can yield huge results. He shows how marketing epidemics can spread by following some simple rules:

- Make your message “sticky” with the target audience.
- The Law of the Few: There are different roles for connectors, experts, and salesmen in getting a message out.
- The Power of Context: “Human beings are a lot more sensitive to their environments than they may seem.”

The Law of the Few is particularly interesting for marketers as we begin to work with the different roles of connector, expert, and salesman.

Connectors have a “special gift for bringing the world together.” They are the folks in your firm who know an exceptional number of people, those with the largest Rolodex or e-mail address list. Their role is to spread a new message and to reach key people early in the spread of the message.

Experts are people who connect others to the marketplace and have the inside scoop as well. They are teachers with a compulsive desire to tell you everything!

For Gladwell, salesmen (and women) have “the skills to persuade us when we are unconvinced of what we are hearing.” To spread successfully a word-of-mouth marketing epidemic, one needs salesmen.

Smiles and nods are incredibly subtle persuaders for people. Gladwell’s presentation of “emotional contagion” suggests that it spreads “outside-in” rather than the reverse; in other words, you can affect the inner state of others positively through your display of enthusiasm. Most of us know the power of a smile on others wherever we work.

Gladwell points out that the classic example of “stickiness” in marketing is successful direct marketing. His conclusion:

“Once the advice becomes practical and personal, it becomes memorable.” So instead of throwing away all the junk mail you get, try reading some of it and seeing what you like about the message and what you can adapt to your next set of marketing materials—the art of story-telling, the power of testimonials, the multiple closes, and so on.

My firm is experimenting with “stickiness” right now on our web site. We added a direct mail newsletter to get site visitors to stick around long enough to register, and the newsletter gives them a reason to come back to the site to get new valuable information. We probably know from our experience that some web sites are “stickier” than others: Think of how Amazon.com recommends additional relevant books to you every time you order something, or even when you log in. Think about how your own company’s web site invites and encourages visitors to return. Maybe we should get rid of all those hyperkinetic Flash openings and extend a warmer invitation. Maybe we should design our sites like the front page of a newspaper (check one out and see how many stories there are on page one), instead of an online brochure.

Finally, Gladwell recommends that, if you are interested in starting a marketing epidemic, you should concentrate all your resources on the three types: connector, expert, and salesman, because “no one else matters.” He speaks of how to carry out tightly focused, targeted interventions in established markets through extensive testing of our intuitions. His final message: “Focus, test, and believe.” ■



About the Reviewer
Jerry Yudelson, P.E., CPSM, is director of Green Building Services for Portland General Electric (www.greenbuildingservices.com), a nationwide sustainable design consulting service for architects, developers, and government agencies. A board member of the U.S. Green Building Council and active in SMPS Oregon, Jerry can be reached by phone at 503-603-1626 or e-mail at jerry_yudelson@pgn.com.



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