

AS SEEN IN THE BEST PLACES TO WORK

SMALL COMPANIES

Communication keeps Brungardt Honomichl on track

BY MARK KIND | STAFF WRITER

Rick Smith is 58 years old, and he has 30 years' experience at one of Kansas City's biggest engineering firms, but he wishes more of those years had been spent at Brungardt Honomichl & Co. PA, where he

has worked since February.

"I go home, and I tell my wife that I'm just extremely pleased with the type of treatment I get here," Smith said.

But it's not the salary or the birthday lunches or the paid employee-spouse trip to San Antonio or even the open house with face painting and ice cream that Smith mentions first when he brags about his workplace.

Engineers appreciate stuff that works smoothly, and Smith said communication is the grease that keeps BHC's operation ticking.

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to people," he said.

Founded in June 1992, BHC rode the wave of telecommunications expansion for about a decade, surveying and planning routes for the information superhighway. As that work slowed, the firm has diversified into public work and private development surveying and engineering, President Kevin Honomichl said.

"We've had to make a major adjustment in our customer base," he said. "I think that's by far one of the biggest challenges we've faced."

Making the transition possible was a work force unlike the typical engineering office, he said. Honomichl seeks out engineers who are as eager to greet a new customer as boot up the latest AutoCad upgrade.

"Most of our technician-level people have client contact," he said.

That allows employees to not only excel in areas where they've had professional and academic training but also to develop and use people skills.



BRUNGARDT HONOMICHL & COMPANY, P.A.

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He said the firm is strong on "the basics," offering salaries and benefits that are competitive with other local firms'.

And the firm offers incentives, such as a trip to San Antonio for employees and spouses if the firm makes an ambitious target this year. Every supervisor has a stash of "spot bonus" incentives on hand as well, such as dinner certificates given to employees who've had to work late on a project and keep a spouse waiting at home.

Winter holiday parties and summer ice cream open houses also keep family members linked to BHC.

But the employees would rather talk about how efficiently they can work, thanks to communications among themselves and with clients.

"We are very conscious and do some deliberate things to keep everybody engaged in what's going on," Honomichl said.

Those deliberate things include:

- Weekly progress meetings on all of the firm's jobs where everyone is updated on the status of projects.
- Regular staff meetings to update everyone on the firm's business health. "We talk about some of the gory details about our internal operations, how we're doing financially, bottom line and top line," Honomichl said.
- Lunch with the Bunch each month to socialize and also keep the staff communicating and interacting.
- Company news reports mailed to employees' homes to keep them apprised of such developments as the merger this month with Rhodes Surveyors, which will boost the work force from 25 to 35.
- Open discussion of successes and mistakes on projects to reduce the likelihood of repeating mistakes and increase the likelihood of repeating successes.

Smith said he appreciates the thanks he gets for completing a tough job on deadline, as well as the praise that comes from doing the job well.

Engineering technician Rich Colson is only a few years out of college and has been at BHC for less than three months, but he's been around enough engineering offices to understand that open workplace communication is as much an employee benefit as good dental, a fat 401(k) match and vision insurance.

"I would argue that is an employee benefit," he said. "When I'm given the right tools to do my job, I'm happier in my job, and the client is happier, so I would argue it is a perk."

mkind@bizjournals.com | 816-421-5900



SECOND PLACE