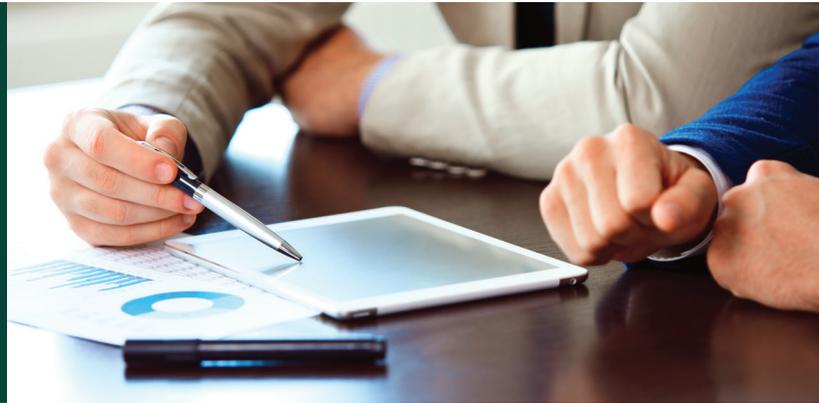


Burns & McDonnell CEO: Thankful for Colleagues Who Own It

by Greg Graves

Former Chairman and CEO of Burns & McDonnell, a global engineering, architecture, construction, and environmental consulting firm.



It's the question we're all sure to be asked at some point in the next couple of weeks: "What are you most thankful for this year?" It's a question I ask myself ... not because I have a lack of things to be thankful for, but rather, because it makes me assess what I'm doing to contribute to others.

Granted, the good fortune in my life isn't to be underestimated. My family, living in a great place like Kansas City (home of the World Champion Royals!) and working for a company like Burns & McDonnell are all the obvious choices. Yet, because I've been so blessed, I've been thinking a lot about how successful companies like ours can ensure our employees have much to be thankful for as well.

Given the challenges our country is facing, it's more important than ever for companies to ensure a prosperous future for working Americans and their families. In my experience, I believe the best path towards prosperity for all is through employee-ownership, and cultivating an "ownership culture" in the workplace ... a culture of diligence, accountability and opportunity for every employee, at every level.

It's simple, really. When a company is owned by its employees, things run a little differently. It's not just 'business as usual;' it's not about punching a time clock. When employees start thinking like owners, they take on a different attitude about their company, their job, and their responsibilities. They tend to work more effectively, paying closer attention to risks and making smarter decisions - with an eye towards success on every task, every project, every day.

Because, in the end, the more successful the company, the greater the potential for long-term financial prosperity and security for employee-owners.

Companies benefit too; an ownership-attitude from employees results in greater innovation, high productivity, lower turnover, and long-term loyalty, to name just a few.

I'm proud to say that Burns & McDonnell is one of very few American companies where 100 percent of the company is owned by 100 percent of the employees.

That means everyone shares in the benefits of a job well done - not just a fortunate few at the top. Our mission to make our clients successful is not just professional, it's personal. And delivering success fuels our passion and pride for serving our clients and our communities, while creating a place where we can feel excited about coming to work every day.

On a personal level, being able to help our employees improve their lives is vitally important. When my wife and I were first starting out, we both came from a humble background and had little to show for our efforts beyond our education and each other. In fact, for the first year, we lived in subsidized housing. I still remember some of the people we knew in those homes that were struggling just to get by and as a result, I've always thought it was important that companies provide something more to their people than just a job.

So as we slow down into the holiday season and reflect on things we're thankful for this year, I encourage my fellow business leaders to think about how your companies are giving back to your employees, the communities where you operate and to the American economy as a whole.

I realize employee ownership isn't a new idea, but reflecting on how richly I've been blessed, I have no doubt that it is the right one. Someone once said, "Ownership is a powerful incentive for ordinary people to do extraordinary things;" I couldn't agree more.