

TOP PLAYER

The right environment for success

Hot Firm leader's concern for our planet has helped create a winning company.

If you still don't believe that passionately believing in something ultimately leads to success, read Wendi Goldsmith's story below. She is the CEO and founder of **Bioengineering Group** (Salem, MA), a 90-person environmental planning and restoration firm, and number 25 on *The Zweig Letter* 2010 Hot Firm List.

The Zweig Letter: What does it mean to be a Hot Firm?

Wendi Goldsmith: It demonstrates the recognition the firm has been receiving from our clients and peers, not only by covering the basic practice in the A/E field, but going further to achieve something noteworthy. Our pioneering work in the field of sustainable design keeps attracting new clients, and existing clients come back for more as we successfully deliver triple-bottom-line results for projects that balance ecology, economy, and society.

TZL: How did you get where you are today?

WG: Our recent stellar growth is rooted in our conviction and success in practicing sustainable design, which now is in such high demand from our clients. Twenty years ago I saw a huge gap related to putting current ecological research and policy into practice within the design and construction fields in order to help address global change impacts.

TZL: Do you remember your first paid job? What did you learn then that still influences the way you work today?

WG: In hindsight, I was a born entrepreneur, having been a baby-sitting, dog-walking income earner since grade school. I felt very empowered by the responsibility and the money, and I never forgot that the calls would stop coming if I failed to leave happy kids and dogs in my wake by paying loving attention to personal details, something that holds true in our business today.

TZL: What is it in your DNA that drives you to success? Is it audacity and risk-taking; a can-do attitude and a relentless pursuit of perfection; something else more abstract?



Wendi Goldsmith,
CEO and Founder,
Bioengineering Group.

WG: People who know me say that I am an innovator and risk-taker, and a relentless one at that. I encourage the project team to proceed, despite any and all obstacles, when a worthy goal is being pursued. As environmental challenges facing our natural world mount, our response requires new and

innovative thinking and action. Translated to recent client work, this means finding bold new ways to accomplish a project, such as the New Orleans hurricane protection infrastructure, in a fraction of the time of past approaches, and with positive environmental impacts, using design/build methods and a restoration focus. Our ongoing work supporting the establishment of military installations with net-zero energy, waste, and water footprints is something that many don't even believe in, but we won't stop until we have demonstrated what is possible.

TZL: In today's difficult business climate, what does it take to succeed? Is the spectrum of failure a motivator?

WG: I always focus on the positive, not the ever-present danger of failure. When things get tough, I generally raise the bar and you'd be surprised how often that succeeds.

TZL: Where do you see this industry in 10 or 20 years? What trends are influencing it? What about your company?

WG: I see interest in sustainable design continuing to expand in the future, as successful projects show more people at a gut level why the trend is

finally being embraced by the government, as well as private clients.

TZL: Do you hold someone as a special mentor? How did this person influence who you are?

WG: Early in my career, I was fortunate to train in Germany under the world's foremost practitioner of river and shoreline restoration using bio-engineering techniques— Mr. Lothar Bestmann. His cutting-edge technologies and ideas have been embraced globally and I continue to embrace his fervor to always look for a sustainable solution. His mentorship demonstrated to me the importance of teaching and sharing knowledge, and I pay it forward by speaking to young women at local schools, universities, and science organizations and fostering an international exchange internship program at the firm.

TZL: What's the one trait you most admire in people and why?

WG: The trait I find most admirable is perseverance and not quitting when the going gets tough. I gravitate toward people who find creative and effective ways to accomplish worthwhile objectives, and then ideally I help bring them together to form teams of people who together can achieve even more.

TZL: Describe the most challenging thing you have ever done/the biggest challenge you have taken on outside of work?

WG: The thing that comes to mind is raising two small children and finishing my second Master's degree while ushering the firm through its early growth phase a decade ago.

TZL: What question would you ask of another Hot Firm leader?

WG: I would ask whether they started their business, or a new direction for their business, based on heart or on mind, on analysis or on a sense of calling. And I would ask them to share their insights about the role that rigor and objectivity play, versus passion and appeal. I see both sides of the coin as being crucial, but there is little business information that sheds light on the topic. ▀▀