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ACE STRATEGIC CONSULTANT EMILY HERNDON, LEED AP, HAS A TEAM, AN ENTREPRENEURIAL SPIRIT, AND A GRAND PLAN

By Richard Massey

WITH NEARLY 20 YEARS OF EXPERIENCE on her resume, Emily Herndon is a recognized expert in the field of strategic asset management. Her job is to meet with a client, evaluate their facilities and, through an assortment of means, figure out how to make those facilities perform better. Easier said than done, of course. And when clients come calling, they do so in a state of distress. Since Herndon works with federal owners with enormous asset portfolios, the challenges are big and the solutions even bigger. But for Herndon, that's what it's all about.

"They've got a problem that they can't solve," Herndon said of her clients. "They end up liking us at the end of the day."

Her specialty is federal clients, agencies that manage millions of square feet of facilities. Projects can take months, and even years, to complete. Her work can take her anywhere, and can involve almost anything, from locks and dams to an abandoned missile silo.

"You never know exactly what you're going to find," she said.

For over seven years she was at Booz Allen Hamilton, a mega-firm, and from there went to Jacobs, an even bigger mega-firm, for nearly 12. In May, she took a position at Woolpert, where, as a senior consultant, she helped found the firm's Strategic Consulting group, which focuses on asset management in aviation, water, land management, and federal facilities.

"Everyone's managing their assets with limited budgets, and everyone's assets are aging," she said.

Clients have a surplus of data and don't know what to do with it. Moreover, clients are finding themselves at important crossroads, hence the need to contact people like Herndon. This, Herndon said, is what clients are saying about themselves: We need to manage ourselves more strategically. We can't get by without a plan anymore.

Apparently this conversation is taking place a lot, because Herndon and her growing team are busy.

"There's so much work out there," she said. "Right now, we have more work than we can do."

A Conversation with Emily Herndon

C+S: What will be your top priority as a board member of the NIBS Facility Maintenance and Operations Committee?



Emily Herndon: I'm really looking forward to bringing a fresh new perspective to the committee. My first priority is to work with the board to develop our strategic plan where we will outline the committee's short- and long-term goals, what we plan to accomplish over the next 3-5 years and how we plan to get there. The Facility Maintenance and Operations Committee has an incredible purview that addresses over 75 percent of the building's total cost of ownership and everything we can do to enhance life-cycle performance improves the overall industry.

C+S: From your vantage point, what do you see as the greatest challenge to sustainability in terms of asset management.

EH: Asset management is inherently a practice in sustainability. By managing your portfolio in a strategic, comprehensive and holistic manner, your assets will operate more efficiently. I think we are challenged a bit in the perception that sustainability has fallen off the radar and is not generally made a priority by leadership. As sustainability professionals we need to understand that sustainability concepts should

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WOOLPERT SENIOR STRATEGIC CONSULTANT SELECTED TO SERVE ON BOARD OF NIBS FACILITIES COMMITTEE

Woolpert Senior Consultant Emily Herndon, LEED AP, has been selected to serve on the board for the National Institute of Building Sciences (NIBS), Facility Maintenance and Operations Committee (FMOC). NIBS is a group of industry, government and agency experts who identify and solve issues that would otherwise hamper the construction of safe, affordable structures throughout the U.S. The FMOC works to improve the performance and longevity of buildings through effective maintenance and operation, improved total cost of ownership and life-cycle strategies for the nation's built environment.

NIBS was established by the U.S. Congress in 1974 as a nonprofit, non-governmental organization and is responsible for standards, including the Whole Building Design Guide, Integrated Resilient Design Program and buildingSMART Alliance. – Woolpert

be incorporated into every business plan and not be viewed as a stand-alone initiative. Perhaps one of the largest sustainability opportunities across an asset portfolio is to improve operations and maintenance performance, thereby reducing natural resource consumption, improving building life-cycle and, ultimately, improving the value of the investment.

C+S: You have worked with some large and important public-sector clients like the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the Federal Aviation Administration, the Centers for Disease Control, and the EPA, among others. What does it take to effectively manage a project with such cumbersome government agencies?

EH: While it may seem that large government agencies are challenging projects, I've found that our clients are passionate, creative and innovative. Our federal clients lead the nation in developing and implementing cutting edge asset management programs across some of the most complex and unique asset portfolios. I feel really privileged to have the opportunity to work on these projects. With a \$264 billion portfolio, USACE Civil Works is a great example. Their efforts were recently identified by the Government Accountability Office (GAO) as a comprehensive and strategic approach to asset management and they represent one of the nation's largest owners.

C+S: What motivates you to tackle such big projects?

I guess it's all I've ever known. I began my career at Booz Allen Hamilton where my first client right out of college was the Environmental Protection Agency. From day one, I've been engaged with large clients who come to us with complex problems to solve. Every client engagement is a challenge, and while they are all tackling similar issues of aging portfolios and limited budgets, each client brings a unique set of circumstances and operating parameters.

C+S: You were at Jacobs for nearly 12 years before taking a position with Woolpert. While Woolpert is a large and influential firm with around 800 people, it's not quite a mega-firm like Jacobs with nearly 80,000 employees. Why the change after 20 years in the business?

EH: As I mentioned above, I started my career at Booz Allen Hamilton, a large management consulting firm, followed by 12 years at Jacobs. Two very large firms with so much to offer their employees. I'm extremely grateful for the training I received at Booz and the exposure to some of the most interesting clients at Jacobs. I've also met and worked with some of the most talented people in the industry.

When I was approached with the opportunity to build a strategic consulting group from the ground up within Woolpert, I thought it was the perfect time in my career to do it. I've loved the entrepreneurial environment and really appreciate the fact that senior leadership sees the value that strategic consulting brings to the firm as a whole.

C+S: Woolpert CEO & President Scott Cattran recently said his top priority is firm longevity, shareholder value, and employee happiness. What's the big cultural difference you are experiencing between Jacobs and Woolpert?

EH: Firms (large or small), are ultimately a collection of people and shared values. Woolpert presents an exciting opportunity to be immersed in an engaging and innovative culture that actually "walks the walk" with respect to employee engagement and career values.

C+S: When you were named to the NIBS Facilities Committee, you talked about the fact that you are not an architect, engineer or designer. How has this outside perspective shaped your career?

EH: This perspective has proved to be a strong asset within NIBS and more broadly across my career. Diversity in experience and training allows our team to bring a more comprehensive approach and solution to each problem. Individual disciplines or practice areas such as architecture or engineering bring a strength in that area, but not always a broader view of the economic, operational, environmental and social values. Integrating all those areas of expertise inherently provides a better outcome.

C+S: You have risen to the top in an AEC industry that is still dominated by men. As a woman, what were your greatest challenges and your greatest triumphs? What is your message to women who are thinking about a career in engineering?

EH: To be honest, I can't think of challenges or triumphs in my career that I can specifically attribute to being a woman. Since day one I've been surrounded by very talented men and women and don't feel like I've been treated any different because of my gender. So, perhaps as we participated in Women's History Month in March, part of my message to women who are thinking about a professional career in technical disciplines is two-fold: don't accept a situation that suggests gender is a factor, and surround yourself with mentors (men and women) who share that view. Beyond your immediate work environment, professional organizations such as the National Institute of Building Sciences offer fantastic opportunities to develop your professional network.

C+S: *You have a BS in Environmental Science and Marine Biology from the University of New Hampshire. This is not the most popular degree in the collegiate world. What drew you to this field of study?*

EH: As a child I wanted to swim with dolphins. I loved to SCUBA dive and snorkel and anything that had to do with the ocean. After a year or two of higher-level biology, physics and chemistry classes, I knew I was a better fit in the business world than the lab. At UNH, the environmental science curriculum included economics, business, writing, and public speaking courses. This well-rounded curriculum really set me up for success in the business world.

C+S: *At some point you did FAA environmental work in Alaska. Did you see any bears? The Aurora Borealis? Mountain tops and salmon spawns?*

EH: No bears or Aurora Borealis, but we did run into a very large moose on a midnight hike. Alaska is one of the many gorgeous locations this job has taken me to.

C+S: *Any final thoughts?*

EH: Work-life balance is possible. Both myself and my spouse, Jim, have professional careers and have managed to find a rhythm and tempo that fits our family – daughters Maddie and Caroline, and a rescue lab named Deacon – that allows us both to be engaged with our children, and to concurrently pursue individual passions such as traveling and running. Don't give up on the idea that work-life balance is an achievable goal!

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