APR_Win Better AEC Business with Cosential

By Loretta Rodriguez, CDFA

SDA's April Networking meeting targeted the marketing and business development elements of the A/E/C industry. Our presenters, Stacie Sikora and James Hnisdo, introduced the group to Cosential, a cloud-based customer relations management (CRM) and proposal generation software used to win better business, grow revenue, increase profitability and accelerate growth exclusively for Architecture, Engineering and Construction firms. Below are key takeaways:

Business Development and Marketing Experience:

- Track leads
- Build collateral and marketing material
- Remember: The primary purpose of CRM is for it to be the sole data structure and use with existing data to alleviate errors in data entry

Cosential Mobile Application

- Business card photography to create contact record.
- The app can associate key words from notes for future use.
- Enrichment of contact info to find social media like LinkedIn
- Log and time stamp phone calls that are time stamped and find relational contacts
- Projects added to maps or to contacts

Outlook Integration

- Add contact information and easily add to the Cosential database
- Create leads
- Add bid dates for submittals
- Appropriate staff are notified
- Track leads or projects awarded

Full Cosential Application

The presentation also included an overview of the programs dashboard, financial processes and finding, project templates and resumes.

MAY_ Back to the Traditional Workplace as COVID-19 Restrictions Ease

By Loretta Rodriguez, CDFA

To better prepare for the reopening of businesses, SDA invited local employment attorneys, Adam D. Courtin and Brandon E. Strey to discuss the latest information for employers relative to employee vaccinations and navigating employees who may not be comfortable with returning to work. Below are key takeaways from May's networking program:

Protecting the Right to Organize Act

- Not passed by the Senate but would broaden the scope of individuals covered by the fair labor standards definitions of "employees" and "contractors".

Family and Medical Insurance Leave (Family) Act

- Reintroduced on 2/12/2021 and funded by employee paycheck deductions / employer contributions paid into insurance fund.

Texas Legislature

- Texas law does not currently address women's compensation coverage for COVID-19.
- Current Texas law suggests that only employees engaged in higher risk jobs than the general public will have viable claims for workers' compensation benefits.
- Texas legislators recently introduced several bills to provide presumptive coverage to first responders and school district employees.
- CARES Act – TX opting out of additional unemployment payments.

Vaccinations

- CDC guidance to be referenced until OSHA revises their guidance.
- Government guidance continually changes but it is generally legal to require vaccination. Consider factors like employee morale, discipline/enforcement, accommodations, administrative burden, and liability.
- A vaccination itself is not a medical examination that is prohibited or limited by the ADA.
- Asking/requiring employees to show proof of vaccine is not a disability-related inquiry under ADA, BUT be mindful of related questions.
- If requiring proof, remind employees to not provide other medical information when doing so.
- For voluntary vaccination programs, pre-screening questions do not implicate ADA.
  - Employee is free to decline answering questions and the vaccine.
  - Employers cannot retaliate against employees who refuse.
- For mandatory vaccination programs, pre-screening questions may implicate ADA.
  - Questions must not elicit questions about a disability and must be consistent with business necessity with responses remaining confidential.
  - Be prepared for accomodation requests for religious reasons or disability.

Miscellaneous

- The American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 extended tax credits through September 30, 2021.
- Title VII – An employer who fires an individual merely for being gay or transgender defies the law.
- Paid sick leave ordinances passed in Austin, Dallas, and San Antonio were blocked.