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## Editorial

BY SAL ALFANO, DIRECTOR OF CONTENT

# Without Peer

Recently I've spent time at two day-long meetings attended by non-competing design/build remodeling companies. Company revenues varied from about \$2 million to about \$25 million, but these were all successful remodelers who met as equals. The meetings weren't about bragging rights. They provided safe, supportive environments in which owners and key employees could put egos aside and admit that they didn't have all the answers; that somebody else might have a better idea.

I found it telling that the average number of years in business for these companies hovers at around 30. Shouldn't the businesses looking for this kind of help be younger? Maybe there were hundreds of these meetings taking place at the same time that I didn't know about, meetings with a whole new generation of owners who understand the value of this kind of exchange of ideas.

Maybe, but I doubt it.

These are social events, and although remodelers are not joiners, they—like the rest of the human race—are social creatures. They will share a beer and an opinion with anybody. But gatherings like this are more than meet-and-greet gab fests. The people in these meetings share hard data about their companies, identify weaknesses as well as strengths, and aren't shy about respectfully challenging practices or policies they find questionable.

So it isn't talking to each other that remodelers have trouble with. And it's not talking to each other about business either. It's talking to each other about *their* business that's the issue.

This is changing, partly because of the Internet and social media, which provide a wider circle of influence and greater access. But while online participation is easy and

increasingly less anonymous, it's still discretionary. If we don't have time or don't like where the discussion is going, we can tune it out. Not so in a face-to-face meeting; participation is mandatory and immediate. There are other advantages to peer get-togethers as well:

**Structure.** A scheduled meeting is more formal than a casual conversation. It requires preparation and self-examination, and it works toward stated objectives.

**Perspective.** Most company owners are too personally invested in their company to honestly evaluate its performance. Their colleagues don't operate with that handicap.



**Remodelers have a problem talking to each other about their business.**

**Commitment.** To be accountable only to yourself is to be accountable to no one. Facing the expectations of a group is a powerful motivator.

**Solutions.** Remodelers are infamous for re-inventing the wheel. It just makes sense to first learn about solutions that others have tried.

**Support.** In my experience, peer groups build strong personal and professional bonds. When something comes up between meetings, you can rely on a group of people you know and trust to see you through the crisis.

It doesn't have to be lonely at the top. You can join an association or sign up with an industry peer group. Or you can arrange to regularly meet with friendly competitors over breakfast or lunch. But you can't continue to do the same thing and expect different results.

Time for change. **PR**

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