

TOP PLAYER

Leading in an industry ready for change

Hot firm leader describes himself as a visionary thinker.

At the same time Mansour Aliabadi was starting his career in the A/E/P and environmental consulting industry 30 years ago in Switzerland, a new construction management venture was launching in Sacramento, Calif.

Their destinies merged in 1982, when Aliabadi joined **Vanir Construction Management, Inc.**, a 350-person pro-

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gram, project, and construction management services firm he now leads. Aliabadi became executive vice president at Vanir just two short years after starting there, and rose to the president and CEO role in 1992.

Since then, Aliabadi has played a major role in establishing Vanir as a leading provider of construction and program management services to public and private sector clients in the United States and internationally.

He also helped the firm earn the No. 22 spot in **THE ZWEIG LETTER** 2011 Hot Firm List.

In this interview, Aliabadi explains that while many factors contribute to success, vision is essential, as it helps see the big picture and visualize the results of one's actions. He also talks about how the industry is ready to change through technology and how think-



Mansour Aliabadi,
President and
CEO, Vanir
Construction
Management,
Inc.

ing outside the box is needed for success.

THE ZWEIG LETTER: What does it mean to be a Hot Firm?

Mansour Aliabadi: Any recognition by the industry that validates the level of success our team has achieved over the last 30 years.

TZL: How did you get where you are today?

MA: Our vision is to be the worldwide leader in program, project, and construction management services. We have a long way to go. We have a clear direction and plan to achieve the goals of our vision.

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

MA: My first job was working in Zurich, Switzerland, for an engineering firm. I learned about hard work and attention to detail. There is no shortcut in life.

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?

MA: All the above points are important, but you need to have a vision. You need to see the bigger picture and to visualize the result of your actions. Also, integrity and respect for others.

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

MA: Think outside of the box. Work

harder and try different and new things. Encourage your team.

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

MA: The design and construction industry is ready for change. Technology is getting to the point that allows better design, collaborating, and virtual modeling before you start moving dirt and pouring concrete. In the last four years, we have done a significant amount of R&D and diversification, which I believe will pay off.

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

MA: My father has been the role model for my work ethic and integrity. Leaders in the construction management industry, and Don Russel in particular, have been the great teachers and mentors I learn from.

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

MA: Integrity and openness.

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

MA: Moving from my home country to the U.S. and adapting to a new environment at difficult times.

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

MA: What is your vision for the future?

TZL: What lesson learned would you pass along to a recent college graduate embarking on a career in the A/E/P and environmental consulting fields?

MA: Technical capability is the basic requirement and is needed, however, a clear vision and detailed plan of how to achieve that vision is essential. Be strategic and build relationships. ▀▲