

CE News “Risky Business” No. 29

John Doe, P.E.

123 Main Street

Nocluesville, VA 12345

Dear John:

You don't know who I am. I represent an owner that's one of your firm's good clients. Over the past six years, you and I have worked together on four projects. To me, they were pretty substantial. You, on the other hand, seemed to find them boring; not nearly as exciting as the larger, more complex, and more challenging commissions I assume you've been engaged for. In fact, your “that's-no-problem-for-us” attitude – while somewhat reassuring – was also somewhat deflating. You've not once demonstrated any excitement or enthusiasm about the assignments I've given you, and that kind of rains on my parade. True: If I needed bypass surgery, I'd be leery of relying on a surgeon who said, “Wow! I really appreciate this opportunity.” But my heart is fine, thanks, and I did not come to you with problems. I came to you with visions. But you were blind to them.

Now let's talk about what's happened after projects have started. I've gotten calls from you, and emails; lots of emails. About once or twice during the course of a project we've met for lunch, but when the project's over, good-bye: I don't see you or hear from you until the next project begins.

It seems strange to me, John, that after working with you for six years, I have no idea of who you are. I assume you're busy, but how can you be so busy that you don't have time for basic civility? Why haven't you ever asked who I am? Am I married? Do I have children? Where do I live? Where did I grow up? go to school? What are my passions? You don't know and, obviously, you don't care. I wouldn't mind knowing such things about you. After all, we probably have much in common, but you're unwilling to share. Sure, you send me a card at Christmas. You sign your name. But so what? You sign

CE News “**Risky Business**” No. 29

dozens of cards that are stuffed into envelopes for you. Frankly, based on how you respond to me, I'd say you regard me as a piece of meat. And, frankly, I'm resentful, and your attitude makes me dislike you. Because of that, you're lucky that nothing bad has happened on any of our projects, because, if something had, I wouldn't have thought twice about proceeding against you, if that's what our lawyers recommended.

I went to a seminar once where the speaker made a point of saying that friends don't sue friends. When two people have good feelings toward one another, they make every attempt to work things out without lawyers. It's not mistakes that lead to lawsuits; it's attitudes.

I read once that more than six of every ten claims brought against architects and engineers are brought by owners. Well, if all those architects and engineers are like you, no wonder. Friends don't sue friends, and design professionals seem as though they're too busy or just too stuck up to treat client representatives like people and establish any kind of relationships – let alone friendships.

And there's something else I'm writing to tell you, John: My company is not going to deal with your firm anymore. Now I suppose you or your boss will call to tell me why I'm making such a bad mistake, and why you're so much better than the company I'm retaining to replace you. Don't bother. For the most part, the different firms performing a given service perform it in the same way – isn't that what standard of care is all about? – and the people they have assigned are about equally educated, trained, experienced, and compensated. You know what really makes the difference between your firm and your biggest competitors? Relationships! And for so long as you are content to sit in your office grinding out work and solving problems – ignoring peoples' needs – you will not have any business relationships.

***CE News* “Risky Business” No. 29**

Wake up, John! Understand that client representatives are people and, like all people, we have needs. Make us feel like we matter to you and that we're important. It's too late for you to do anything about me, but you have a choice about the others. You can learn from this or you can blame it all on me and continue to do what you've always done, and complain about what a jerk I am. Well, I may be a jerk, John, but I'm gone. And with me go my business, my opportunity...and your future.