

BENEFITS OF THE INNER CIRCLE

Being a part of the in-group served our pre-historic ancestors well. With limited resources it was hard to survive — much less live past 30. Abandoning a tough life in isolation for the better survival strategy of cooperative interdependence was smart, allowing us to thrive in hunting and farming; but that was then. In 2011 we theoretically can survive without a “village” — but can we still benefit from being an “insider?”

If you were 6 — or 16 — the answer would be “Yes.” Peer interaction and acceptance when we are young helps us grow emotionally, develop morals, build friendships, learn teamwork, etc. Parents and adults are important, but we learn how to live and work with others by socializing with our peers.

As adults, the answer is more complex and affected by many factors. Two facts remain: All of us are biased in favor of our in-group and that bias influences business and can impact our career.

Years ago, a more experienced consultant told me, “I don’t do anything with coworkers outside of work unless it gets me business.” He was sociable with clients but prickly around the office. Because of his tenure and skill he had great objective value, e.g., he was the “go-to” guy who could predict where projects might fail. He traded on this value for years, believing it guaranteed him raises and promotion.

When it came time to choose a managing partner, the firm weighed his expertise against his subjective value, e.g., his lack of acceptance as a leader, and chose a less technically experienced “insider.”

Then there was a guy I called “Charles the Amazing” because he always knew the scoop before anyone else. He wasn’t



C-LEVEL COACH

Robyn Porterfield

the best consultant but he had great subjective value, e.g. easy to work with, well-liked, motivating, and always making the effort to stay connected to the inner circle. His firm relies on credentials and experience to get business. With his limited objective value he may never get fired, but he is also never going to be CEO.

I share these two stories to illustrate that the value of in-group membership and its impact on your career can be a complex equation; being an “insider” is not a straightforward ticket to success. You have to assess the pros and cons given your specific situation.

So, if you are not an insider, should you be? First, assess whether there is an “insiders club.” If so, can you get in? I work with companies whose insiders are all of one religion, from the same alma mater, all the same gender, or all family. These commonalities make it more difficult to break in.

Next, ask yourself whether insider status is a “need” or a “want.” You may not be driven by promotion, but still want to feel connected and have friends at the office. On the other hand, maybe being an outsider will preclude you from succeeding. In that case, being an insider has actual career value.

Next, consider your objective and subjective value. Like “Amazing Charles,” your subjective value might be your positive attitude, likability, etc. Your objective value might include your unique

expertise. Objective and subjective value may matter differently depending upon your company culture. For example, if your company is highly consensus-driven, being flexible is valuable. If you’re the only IT analyst in a team of sales people, your knowledge might be more important to the company.

Finally, think about what it would take to become an insider — what does the inner circle seem to have in common? Golf? Happy hour? Gourmet cooking? How much time and effort would it take to share those common interests?

Many of us dislike cliques, but they exist and in-group bias is unavoidable at some level. We feel more comfortable with people we know or who are like us. “In group” membership can be based on something meaningful — sharing an ALANON group — or coincidence, e.g., sitting on the same jury. It can even be created randomly — remember choosing up teams for dodge ball in school?

The good news for those who want to be an insider is that there is more than one way to break in. Get to know folks on a personal level. They may be “foodies” or play golf, but no one is one-dimensional. Find out more about what makes them tick and relate on another level.

In some cases, being an insider may be more like work than fun. And remember — just like in high school — when you do get into that in-group you might find that while it’s good for your career, it’s not nearly as cool as you thought it would be.

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THE ART OF DESIGN

NAME: Squires & Co.
BUSINESS: Marketing/communications
HEADQUARTERS: 3624 Oak Lawn Ave., Ste. 200, Dallas, 75219
OWNERSHIP: Private
TOP EXECUTIVE: Jimmy Squires, president
EMPLOYEES: 11
ANNUAL REVENUE: \$1.5 million
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SQUIRES: Print has struggled

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than a page-by-page online magazine. “You still need to get a message to that stockholder and tell them what your heartbeat is,” said Squires, who doesn’t claim to be a “great” designer.

“That’s the problem these days: Everybody thinks they’re a good designer and everybody thinks they’re a good writer,” he said, joking. “Designers and fine artists are a little different. Designers have a niche, whereas I like to paint and draw.”

Today, Squires’ team has switched its focus to the Internet, specializing in motion graphics, website development and other multimedia to accommodate the changing industry.

Even Domtar Paper, a Canadian sustainable paper company and one of Squires’ biggest clients, is moving away from the paper arena and into the digital world with website and iPad applications. But it hasn’t forgotten about print, the medium that’s struggling as technology improves.

Kristin Gray, director of development for the Woodall Rodgers Park Foundation, worked with Squires & Co. for the past two years to rebrand The Park with a logo, tagline and print materials for potential donors.

“I told (Jimmy) we wanted to do something sophisticated, but we wanted to also make it accessible,” Gray said. “And they were really thoughtful about our budget, being a nonprofit.”

Although Squires didn’t design The Park’s website, the firm was involved in its aesthetics, functionality and “anything visual,” Gray said.

Squires said he entertains his artistic talents during his free time, but his day job is keeping him busy.

“We have our hands in so many fires, it’s going to be good for us,” he said.

Another goal is to strengthen the company’s expertise in web development, the need for which Squires says will only continue to grow.

“I saw what the Internet was going to do years ago, and I knew it was going to be the future,” Squires said.

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TWO MINUTES WITH Heather Asbury, Asbury Interiors



The daughter of a great outdoorsman, Heather Asbury grew up fly fishing and hunting. It was only natural then, that the designer brought her eye for luxury and outdoor expertise to the interior design realm of lodges, ranches and cabins. After graduating from Southern Methodist University, Asbury landed her first job as a buyer for Neiman Marcus in the couture office. She went to work on the wholesale side for fashion house Emanuel Ungaro.

Q. How did you get from fine clothing to interior design?

A. I was always interested in the retail/clothing arena. But as my life evolved, my taste evolved. It became less about the clothes and more about the house, family and children. I’m not in the stage of my life where I want to dress to the nines because I’m running carpool, but I want to dress my house, instead.

Q. Your past projects range from Colorado ranches to penthouses. What is your market?

A. It’s funny because what started out as rustic work turned into penthouses at the Ritz-Carlton and the Mansion. Most recently, I did a client’s residence and then his corporate office downtown. The work has led us down a path, and now we’re looking to open an office division hopefully in 2011. I think the trend is people want offices that don’t look so sterile. His office actually looks like a glamorous living room in a home; and very similar in feeling.

Q. What are other trends you see down for 2011?

A. Lots of color, lots of texture. Bold color again, which is sort of cyclical. When people are in a depressed mode from the economy, they tend to gravitate to color to brighten things up.

Q. How has technology changed the design industry?

A. The iPhone has been an amazing device. For a Colorado project, I would literally have the general contractor shoot video and scan a room using it. And I use the iPad constantly. There are some programs that do room layout for you, but I think that becomes robotic and less personal.

Q. What advice do you have for people who don’t have interior designers?

A. One of the biggest problems individuals have is they make bad purchases. They overspend on something and they end up not liking it, or it’s trendy and won’t stand the test of time. Also, focus on scale. If something’s too big or too small, the room never looks right.

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GET IN THE ZONE

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