

knows firsthand what occurs on either side of the fence. He believes that the most important aspect of being an outsourced on-site provider is “the ability to become part of the culture of the company, of your customer. To move from ‘vendor status’ to full-fledged team member is very rewarding as well as challenging. Sometimes, I needed to keep corporate secrets from the GHK organization. I needed the ability to be a chameleon at times.” Baskin delights in the opportunity to “go beyond the traditional architect’s role to become a full-fledged business partner with the customer.”

Of Baskin’s 27 years of professional experience, half were spent in the corporate environment, and half in a consultative role (including his six years on-site with Bank of America). He first joined the corporate ranks because he recognized there was a void in the architectural profession. He did not feel that architects and interior designers knew how to relate to corporate clients. By working for “Corporate America,” he began to understand the client, and enjoyed planning and designing, from start to finish. When he was “rightsized” out in 1990, he had a unique perspective and skill set that others in his profession lacked. That void became his opportunity to move into a consulting role.

Similar experiences have been shared by co-worker Kristen Drewke, an interior designer and project manager, who has spent more than ten years on-site with Baxter Healthcare in Deerfield, Illinois. Drewke defines an on-site provider as one who “lives with the client in their house. You are a guest. You learn and live their business and culture. You learn their politics. You feel and are sensitive to their business ups and downs. You feel and are sensitive to their emotional ups and downs. You become business associates and friends. You walk a fine line between your business and theirs. You must always try to balance the two. You require your management’s understanding and support of the effort. You should be empowered to make decisions. You must be flexible in thought and process.” She believes that on-site providers have an advantage if they have experienced both sides of the industry, with a facilities background as well as a design firm background.

Drewke finds that the work is highly stimulating, and covers a broad area of expertise. She says, “You name it, we’ve done it. Soup to nuts. I have found that if there are boundaries or guidelines, they move. We have done everything from providing graphics for Earth Day and golf outings, to high-level strategic meetings with upper management. Being on-site has both its ups and

downs. But the opportunities are there, if you seek them out and develop them.”

Mitchell Cohen, president of GHK, pioneered an approach in providing on-site facility planning and design services. When Baxter Healthcare mandated the outsourcing of all non-core businesses in 1990, Cohen led the on-site team which included Drewke. They ultimately retained members of the Baxter facilities staff who were being “rightsized out.” Their responsibilities included master planning, strategic facilities planning, standards development, feasibility studies, and churn/move management. Drewke’s on-site team continues these and other services, 10 years later.

Cohen emphasizes the need for outsourced on-site providers to be responsive and flexible. He says, “Every service provider has faced a situation in which, temporarily at least, the workload for a client exceeds the capabilities of the dedicated on-site staff. Whether the spike occurs because deadlines are moved up, more work is required or existing staff become unavailable, the response must be the same: to provide staff in a timely fashion at service levels that meet or exceed the client’s expectations.”

Both Baskin and Drewke cite the following personal traits and characteristics of successful on-site providers: ability to multitask, to focus, and to think on your feet; willingness to address problems as business issues not design/architectural issues; political astuteness; ability to be passionate and take ownership of customer’s issues; charm; honesty and a strong sense of ethics; self-esteem and confidence to gain the respect of customers and peers; and courage to push back and challenge.

Sally Jensen, also an interior designer with GHK, is a member of a multi-supplier on-site team, with Johnson Controls, at Sun Microsystems on the West Coast. She describes the philosophy of her on-site team: “We need to be the kind of individuals who *can* and *will* do whatever is required to get the job done, and done well. We must be willing to not only meet the customer’s expectations, but to exceed them. It really is important to be friendly and easy, while still maintaining control of the workload. We should be likable to most personality types, and be inquisitive and energized enough to enjoy the diversity of the environment which changes daily. We are in the customer’s space, and must respect that fact. We are there for them, not for our own egos.”