

## Make sure, before you say “I Do” to a corporate marriage

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“When companies merge, it is more like a marriage”, said Tom McGovern, Vice President and Regional Manager of MMLA Psomas. Having merged MMLA Inc., a Tucson based firm with Psomas based in San Diego in 2004,

McGovern acknowledges the union may still be in the honeymoon phase. Still, after watching the sometimes disastrous results of mergers and acquisitions over the past decade, McGovern believes that MMLA and Psomas approached the merger the best way – by looking not only at the business advantages of the merger but by making sure that the cultures would be compatible. “We believe that in the Psomas company culture, leadership philosophy, and employee relations we found an excellent match. Everything from price points to quality, developing employees and beyond that to the emphasis on giving back to the professional community,” said McGovern.

Companies, in the heat of the deal, often lose sight of just how important culture is to the success of the merger or acquisition. Lip service is given to “compatible cultures” but in reality, often, the analysis is superficial and naive. Witness how many formerly successful companies lie on the bone pile of employee brain drain and general malaise of workers dissatisfied with the “big company mentality”.

MMLA recognized the fundamental challenges. “We have a lot of employees who have been with us many years and those employees are very loyal to us personally,” McGovern said. Not wanting to squander that loyalty which built their business success, the company looked closely at many cultural and business philosophies. One thing considered essential - the philosophy of how to manage and retain employees.

Roberta China is a good example of that philosophy. She started working at MMLA as a dedicated and hard working administrative assistant. Roberta, a single mother at that time, wanted a better paying job with more responsibility and worked her way to a drafter position. With MMLA’s support, she started and completed a bachelor of science of civil engineering and is still employed by MMLA but as a project engineer. China gets most of the credit for her hard work but MMLA’s philosophy of having all employees on a career path of improvement is a best practice that sets the company apart from many

of their competitors. MMLA Psomas believes that having employees on an improvement path is beneficial whether the employee stays with them or becomes a partner with them while working in their own firm or some other situation.

In an industry where experienced engineers are difficult to find, MMLA grows their own. First, they develop leadership abilities in existing employees. They also extend educational opportunities to promising employees like Roberta and by establishing strong relationships with the university and junior college and hiring promising interns. After the intern works for two years while finishing college and contributing value to the company, they bring additional value to the firm because they are trained. MMLA Psomas becomes the employer of choice and ties up the best and the brightest ahead of graduation.

Tom McGovern recently met with the highly trained, valuable employees of MMLA Psomas. He asked, “What are the biggest changes you experienced since the merger?” The consensus was “There are not any negative changes. The only major change is that there are more opportunities. That’s why we think the marriage is a good one,” said McGovern.

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