



What inspired you to become an engineer?

As a kid, I was fascinated watching a documentary on the building of the pyramids. How could they possibly build these tremendous structures without computers, calculators,

heavy construction equipment, etc... and they were very intricate with stairs and chambers in the interior. I was hooked. I love math, problem-solving, and the ability to see what I have designed come to fruition. I love engineering.

You came from well-established firm. What made you join AKF and can you tell us about the early years?

I have nothing but the most respect for my previous firm. They hired me out of school, and I was assigned to a group. Lenny Koven was the group leader, Bryan Atkinson was HVAC Director, and Ed Feinberg was Electrical Director. After several years, they resigned to start AKF with a new vision – no offices, no titles, unlimited sick days, open books, with three simple core values: integrity, empowerment, and to satisfy the internal client. With this philosophy and a family-like atmosphere, AKF attracted a lot of industry talent. I joined AKF on January 19, 1989 – three weeks after they opened the doors. It has been a great 33-year ride!

Who has made the biggest impact on your career?

Lenny Koven! I worked with Lenny from the time I graduated college in 1981 until he retired. He was a great family man, leader, teacher, and friend. I went to him whenever I needed advice and I couldn't have asked for a better mentor.

What do you feel is your biggest contribution to AKF?

Maintaining the culture, core values, and family atmosphere through all the growth and development of the past 30+ years. We now have 13 offices and over 400 people hired from myriad engineering firms in different geographies and each with its own culture and way of conducting business.

What was the biggest hurdle as Managing Partner? How did you get through it?

As I look back, there were many hurdles to overcome, and it gives me the willies thinking about them and realizing how fragile a firm can be. 9/11 and the Great Recession of 2007/2008 are the two top hurdles. 9/11 because it was tragic and emotionally draining, and the Recession because of its duration and financial impact. As a result of the Recession, for the first time AKF was forced to lay off firm members due to lack of work. Partners took a 20% cut in pay and firm members were asked to sacrifice and take a 12% salary reduction. The Executive Committee met daily to monitor our finances and reach out to our clients and offer assistance. It took about a year before we could restore salaries and several years to recover, but it was a "New Normal" that AKF had to adjust to.

What is your favorite part about working at AKF?

It sounds cliché but it's the people and the way we treat and care for one another. A family atmosphere. In addition, we have been able to attract very talented people because of our culture and core values. Talented people attract top notch clients and great projects which makes it all very exciting!

What is the project you are most proud of?

I have been involved with too many projects to count or remember, some iconic and award-winning and others fairly normal. One that stands out and brings a smile to my face every time I think about it is the Butterfly Conservatory at the American Museum of Natural History. It brings joy, laughter, and smiles to the young and old every day!

This project was technically demanding and required thinking outside the box. To accommodate the butterflies, we had to provide a tropical environment temperature, humidity, and intensity of the sun; plus, the museum wanted it to be a kit of parts so it could be knocked down in the spring and reassembled in the fall. The temperature and humidity were easily solved and high intensity lighting was provided to approximate the sun. Flex ductwork and plug and play theater wiring were used for power. Air curtains were installed with vestibules to prevent the butterflies from hitching a ride and escaping. Very low velocity return air grilles were used so the butterflies would not be captured by the grilles.

Everything went according to plan; plants were brought in and then the butterflies – some very exotic. It was functioning very well and then I received a phone call over the weekend before opening that the butterflies had died. Very sad and very stressful. The plants had been sprayed with pesticides! However, the exhibit has now been successfully in use for 25+ years. Very gratifying!