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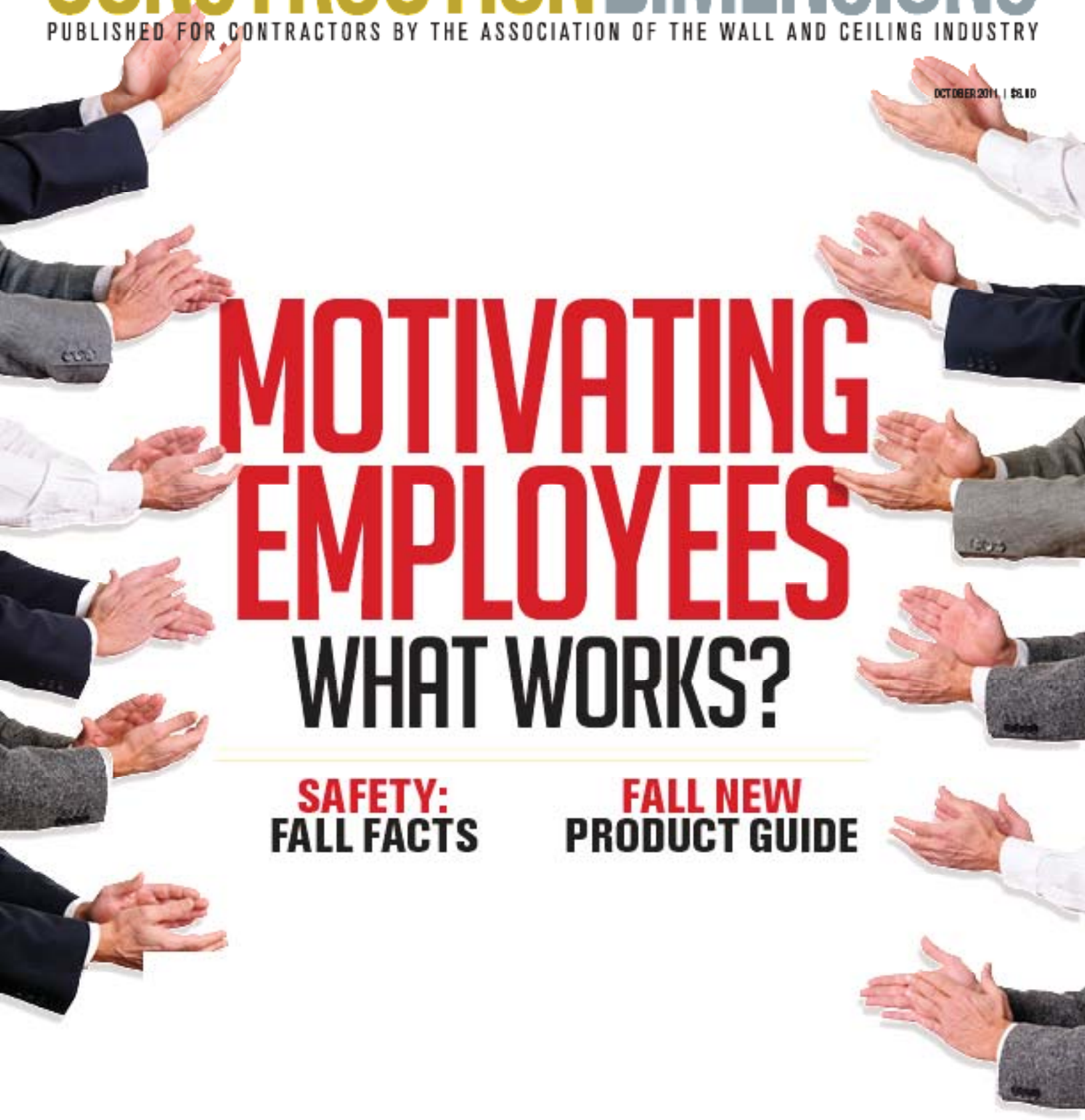

MOTIVATING EMPLOYEES
WHAT WORKS?

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Technology and Employee Motivation

By Mark L. Johnson

Elsewhere in this magazine, I report on what drywall and ceiling contractors say is the key to motivating employees. The article makes the point that employee *involvement* in job planning and review leads to a charged-up work ethic — in essence, motivation.

What I didn't understand as I began reporting the story was just how powerful technology is at motivating the ranks. Since the employee motivation feature article covers a broad topic-set, I'm going to develop the tech point here.

DALEY'S DAILY DATA

Craig Daley, president, Daley's Drywall & Taping, Campbell, Calif., says his company has embraced job-tracking technology. The company uses production software to set production quotas and improve workflow. The software integrates the takeoff and estimating process by digitally tracking labor production and payroll directly from the field.

Lately, Daley's has stepped up its data-tracking efforts. "In February, we started tracking jobs on a *daily* basis, instead of weekly or monthly as we once did," Daley says.

Basically, Daley's loads its jobs into the program. Then, using the software, project managers and foremen can click on various assemblies to determine how long the crews will need to build them. "It's helpful because you can stick to the plans," says John Bettencourt, project manager and foreman, Daley's Drywall & Taping. "You click on a 'wall,' and it tells you, 'This is what you need to do today.'"

Such electronic expectations *motivate*? Yes, Daley and Bettencourt say. Rather than feeling that the quotas apply unfairly to their work, the crews appreciate having the benchmarks, which become targets to shoot for.

"They like knowing what they need to get done," Daley says, "rather than working their butts off and at the end of the day not knowing if they did enough."

HIGH-SPEED DATA LINES

Similarly, Component Assembly Systems, Inc., Pelham, N.Y., likes having a tech "A" game.

"One thing different with us is that we create and master our own data. We bought a data company, so we're in charge of it," says John Rapaport, director of operations, Component Assembly Systems. "The foremen have password-access to the system and see everything."

Component Assembly Systems has about 900 employees. Projects tend to be large and typically last from 18 months to two years. To help handle it all, the company's field offices are integrated with technology.

"We bring in high-speed [data] lines and set up work stations with large screens. We can look at changes in drawings right on the screens, right in the shanty," Rapaport says. "Mobile devices aren't ready for us as yet, although we do electronic payroll on some tablets in the field."

Rapaport says the key to tech is involving the field personnel. He says they understand why the data are important and take ownership of the data-collection process. "It's not just a port one way to the office," he says. "It's a back-and-forth process and very healthy for us." The jobs run better, he says, because the crews have friendly competition while aiming to hit their production targets.

STANFORD CALLING

CAS's use of technology boosts morale in another way: Rapaport says technology helps the company with recruiting.

"We've gotten a lot of top students out of the top schools," he says. "They feel we have the latest tech in the industry."

For example, Rapaport says the company just hired several graduates from Purdue University, a school recognized for its science and engineering majors. Recently, a master's grad from Stanford University contacted the company about work. "I asked how she found us, and she said it was through a LinkedIn discussion [group]," Rapaport says. (LinkedIn is a professional social networking site.)

"I came to the company in 1991," Rapaport says. "There was no email. The field was just about building, and the PHs were 'reacting'—ordering materials and holding meetings—and not necessarily getting the top information they needed."

Nowadays, data tools provide information that CAS project managers use to foster better relationships with the foremen and their crews.

"If we do it in two hours less than the budget, then when we get to the next floor we try to do it in three hours less," says Michael Todaro, CAS project manager. "We put all this information up on projection screens. We're keeping score. The crews know we're keeping score, and they like it."

Now that's power.

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