

BUILDER

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Eight Great Companies to Work For

*You Couldn't Lure These
Employees Away If You Tried!
page 68.*

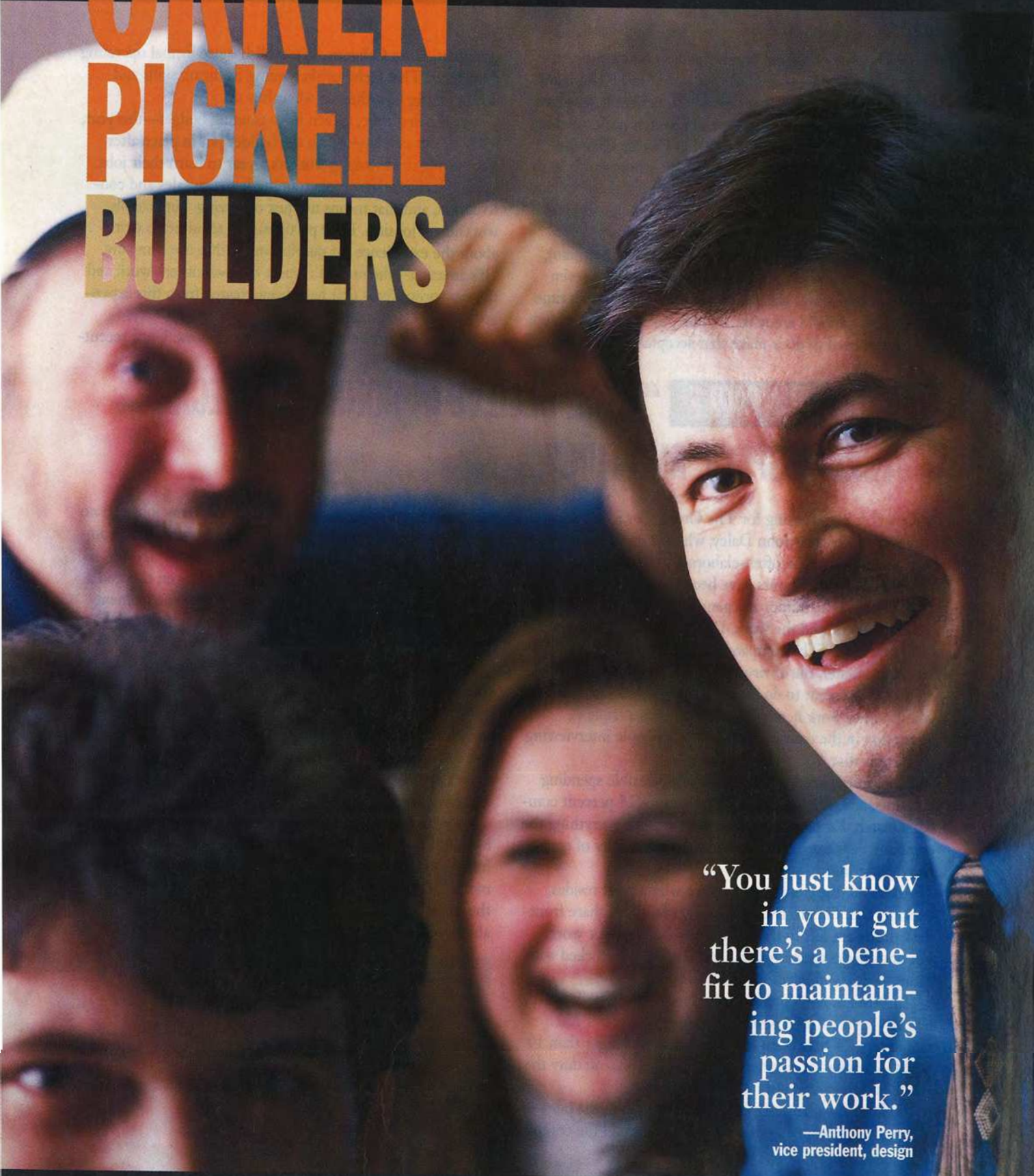


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Profits Down Under:
Selling Basements, **page 100**
Kitchen & Bath Ideas, **page 120**
Public Company
Report Card, **page 151**

ORREN PICKELL BUILDERS

BANNOCKBURN, ILL.; YEARS IN BUSINESS:



“You just know
in your gut
there’s a bene-
fit to maintain-
ing people’s
passion for
their work.”

—Anthony Perry,
vice president, design

Pickell employees (left to right) Greg Schaar (with hat), Brian Ries, Sara Weaver, and Anthony Perry.

Orren Pickell is an engineer, of sorts. Not of things, but of teams of people. He sees each person—including himself—as an individual set of strengths and weaknesses, and he works to fit jobs to employees, not the other way around. At the same time, he pushes his crew to pursue fresh ideas and unfamiliar skills—whatever it takes to become better. The result is a hard-earned reputation as an employer of choice in the Chicago area.

Keeping the energy flowing is central to the company's dynamism. Consequently, Pickell, the president, welcomes anything that keeps people motivated and moving forward. That's why the builder encouraged a young architect to get his state license, and paid him a bonus for doing so.

Pickell's head of design, Anthony Perry, recalls the time Orren took the division on a riverboat tour to discuss the

task of managing all the design contests that the company enters. That's a small price to pay for a vastly improved process, believes the company.

To learn from the experience and knowledge of others, team members periodically rotate through other departments. By maintaining person-to-person contact, the routine facilitates the handoff of a customer through the building process, as a sales associate introduces the customer to the architect, who in turn acquaints the home buyer with the estimator, and so on. In that chain, says Perry, "No one wants to let anyone down. No one wants to be the weak link."

So when Pickell does spot a mistake, he brings the group together and reminds them of the impact of all their actions on the end product and on the customer. Identifying who made the mistake would be beside the point. On the other hand, when an employee's or a department's performance is

PEOPLE PRINCIPLE: "WE ARE COMMITTED TO SECURING FOR OUR EMPLOYEES AN ENVIRONMENT OF PERSONAL ACHIEVEMENT, GROWTH, AND ADVANCEMENT."

architectural features of the Chicago skyline. And last summer, Orren hired a well-known architectural renderer to give the staff a three-day seminar. "Any time we can hook into things like that," Perry says, "it makes people have a zest for what we do."

Pickell's philosophy is to hire people with positive attitudes, integrity and talent, and willingness to learn. He provides on-the-job training, including assigning new hires in their first three to six months to work with his most experienced employees. Pickell believes that apprenticeship is the company's most important training.

The builder's hiring process is lengthy, with job candidates facing an interview panel of as many as six people. Perry recalls when he was hired six years ago. "It's sometimes frustrating to job applicants. We're very slow to hire. It's only because we're really careful," he says.

"It all comes down to picking the right people and helping them pick the right people," Pickell believes. "You have to have an exceptional group of people, who are working to offset their weaknesses. I wouldn't call myself an exceptional manager, but I surround myself with people who are."

Employees are rewarded for showing initiative, particularly if they take on projects no one else seems to want. One worker earned herself a nice bonus when she assumed the

good, Pickell makes sure it is recognized. "Every department tries to blow the customer away," he says. "When they do, we bring that to everyone's attention."

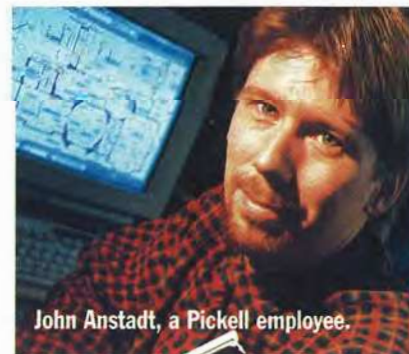
Driving these initiatives is Pickell's focus on reducing job stress. By using the "latest and greatest technology," he says, the company is giving workers the tools to do 80 percent of their jobs by rote. Its software gives people a punch list every week. That puts sense and order into their work and leaves them just 20 percent to manage.

"There's nothing like experience to keep the stress level down. If you can be profoundly better than everyone else, you're going to make more money." And if you offer a less stressful environment with a 40-hour workweek, he says, you have your pick of job applicants.

He has seen his philosophy pay off. "You can walk down the hall here and see how people treat each other. You can see it in the help they give each other, the lack of selfishness."

That translates into superior service, says Pickell. "I don't have unhappy customers."

► See page 82



John Anstadt, a Pickell employee.