

12. Lee Ready
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Ready Engineering is a 27-person electrical and controls consulting engineering firm based in Spruce Grove, Alberta, Canada.

Staffing for project needs

Most of the time, Ready Engineering plans for projects just three weeks to three months ahead. For some firms this would create a big staffing headache but Ready is able to use this scheduling scenario to their advantage. The firm hires casual employees when necessary to meet project needs so they are not sitting on overhead when there is less work available. They have had good luck with converting casual employees to full time. According to Lee Ready, “about 90% of our casual employees work out so well that we take them on full time.”

What happens when the work slows down? Depending on the strengths of the people, they are diverted to business development work, internal projects, or research and development. Most of the casual employees are people right out of university or with just a few years of experience. Ready makes it a point to invest heavily in training them so they can make themselves more marketable as soon as possible. “We view staff training as a partnership,” explains Lee Ready, “the firm puts up the training dollars but the casual employees are expected to learn on their own time.”

The strategy with full-time employees is a little different but follows the same philosophy—people train on the firm’s time and their own time but those who train on their own time get increased training budgets.

How does Ready guard against becoming a training ground for competing firms? They have created a small company atmosphere and culture and ensure that their employees are well-compensated. They are also careful not to exploit their staff—overtime is rewarded with additional pay or time off in lieu.

Aggressive Scope Management

Ready experiences very few project write-offs which contributes to their overall superior project performance. During contract negotiations the firm is picky on scope, but aggressively manages scope during the course of the project. "Many of our clients are not sure what they need when they bring us in," explains Lee Ready, "we recognize that and build enough slack in our project scopes to do what's right on the project. This is the value proposition we offer."

When does the firm allow write-offs? When they don't think they have delivered the value that the client deserves. "I can count the number of times this has happened on one hand," says Lee Ready.

Playing to Strengths

Ready prides itself on helping people find their place in the firm and do things that add the most value to the clients. A good example of where this plays out is in business development. "We have some people who are good at building new client relationships and others who are not," explains Ready, "the ones who are not might be good at early prospecting to ferret out business opportunities and pass them on to others." This is a common theme that runs through Ready and has contributed significantly to their success in helping clients.