

CASE STUDY



CASE STUDY: Leading a Large-Scale, Highly Complex, Multi-Year Project

How a Diverse Team Collaborated to Build a \$700m Award-Winning Facility Ahead of Schedule and Under Budget



OBJECTIVE:

To build the most patient and family-centric hospital facility in the country, on time and within budget, while keeping everyone safe.

In August 2007, the Dallas County Commissioners Court approved a Blue Ribbon Panel's report to build a replacement hospital for Parkland County Hospital. In 2008 Dallas County voters overwhelmingly approved the bond election. The new Parkland facility would be over three million square feet with a budget of \$1.326 billion.

Balfour Beatty Construction formed a coalition of companies, including Balfour Beatty, Austin Commercial, H.J. Russell and Azteca Enterprises, and called the team BARA. In April 2009, Parkland officials awarded construction of the two million square foot, \$700 million hospital to BARA.

Balfour Beatty had worked with Ann McGee-Cooper & Associates (AMCA) on several large projects using servant leadership as a model. They knew that in order to be successful on a project of this size, with such a vast supply chain and a workforce of some 2,000 people onsite at its high point, an INTERdependent teaming model would be needed. So that June, key leaders of the Parkland Project met with AMCA to create a "vision" and "covenant" based on the principles of servant leadership. Two phrases stood out that would become the symbols of this project:

*The most patient and family-centric facility in the country.
Iconic, timeless and enduring.*



CHALLENGES:

To lead a large-scale, highly complex project with a diverse team that would bring different opinions and perspectives but would need to come together behind a common vision.

The team knew there would be differences, with so many variables—some within and some outside their control—and with so many disparate professionals from four firms coming together, most of whom had never worked together before. Additionally, more than just a typical construction project, developing this facility would require input and insights from design, patient advocacy, technology, environmental, and other consultants. A project of this size becomes very complex with many leaders involved at many levels.



BARA also knew that waves of talent would be joining the project across its five years of development, and that meant onboarding classes would be necessary to keep the teaming momentum high.

SOLUTIONS:

Building a common vision and cohesive, collaborative team with a foundation of servant leadership and Whole Brain® Thinking.

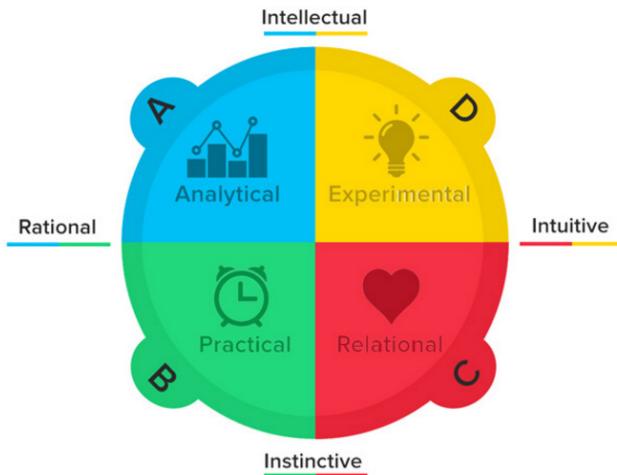
Walt Massey, National Healthcare Practice Leader, Balfour Beatty Construction, was instrumental in pulling together the highly talented, disparate group of construction professionals. Together with AMCA, he built a high-trust, high-performing team using the principles of servant leadership and Whole Brain® Thinking.

The Process

Following the development of the vision, AMCA led the team through a process to create a “covenant” documenting how they would settle differences and treat one another as they worked using the principles and practices of servant leadership.

Then the work began. Design teams met. Patient advocate groups weighed in. Technology consultants offered expertise...and the vision began to take form. The new Parkland Hospital would be a safe, welcoming, patient-centered healing environment, serving as a sustainable green resource for Dallas County. It would promote excellence in clinical care, teaching and research and a technologically advanced and accessible environment.

Key to the initiative was the administration at project kick-off of the Herrmann Brain Dominance Instrument® (HBDI®) assessment, which defines and describes a person’s preferences for thinking across the four quadrants of the Whole Brain® Model. As part of the overarching servant leadership approach, the HBDI® provided the team with specific insights about how thinking preferences affect communication, collaboration, trust and problem solving.



The four-color, four-quadrant graphic and Whole Brain® are registered trademarks of Herrmann Global, LLC. © 2015 Herrmann Global, LLC

Figure 1: The Herrmann Whole Brain Model

Pleas Mitchell, Senior VP and Business Unit Leader at Balfour Beatty Construction, explains:

"To me, the HBDI®—Whole Brain® Thinking—is the foundation. It's the language. If you don't have that, then everybody's putting their best ideas up, and they're still seeing it through their preferred brain quadrant. And they expect everybody else that's seeing it is looking at it through the same prism. If I put something out there—and I have a high D-quadrant preference—someone with high B-quadrant preferences might think, 'Well that's the craziest thing ever. We can't do that. We've got rules, etc.' Without having the foundation of the HBDI® and understanding where they're coming from, the chances for miscommunicating are huge. So to me it's just a lot of talk without doing the HBDI® work, and a lot of just hoping for the best."

Mitchell says that Whole Brain® Thinking became the tool for ensuring everyone was respectful and inclusive of each person's view of the world. The ability to draw on different perspectives and the diversity of thought available to the entire team ensured that no potential issues or problems were overlooked and that the best ideas and solutions would come to the surface.

In addition to on-boarding classes for new team members joining the project over the course of the five years, AMCA conducted servant leadership skill-building sessions with the BARA team leaders in their monthly team meetings to teach and reinforce teaming skills such as conflict resolution, assuming good will and creating "Third Right Answers" (a creative solution not immediately obvious that benefits all stakeholders). The impact was readily evident, particularly when compared to typical construction projects of this magnitude.

"On many projects, people hate each other. But here there's been great esprit de corps," says Lou Saksen, Senior Vice President of Facilities Planning and Development, Parkland Health and Hospital Services. "We have had no litigation. Sure, there are disagreements, but we worked together to always focus on solutions that put the success of the project first. It's really special to be glad about getting up and coming to work."

With the “vision” and “covenant” as their guideposts, pointing the way to a common higher purpose, the team applied the principles of servant leadership and Whole Brain® Thinking skills to draw on the strengths of its diversity, navigate conflict and difficult decisions, solve complex problems, build and maintain trust, and stay calm in the face of shifting conditions and challenges.

RESULTS:

Project completed ahead of schedule, under budget with zero litigation, best-in-class employee engagement scores and award-winning results.

“Whole Brain® Thinking has significantly improved communication and trust. When we learned that trust is different for each of the four quadrants of the brain, this helped us all rethink how we formed our opinions around trust. It has really improved the many ways we support each other and play to each other’s strengths and balance each other’s blind spots.” – David Graham, JV leader and Project Director, Austin Commercial

The investment in servant leadership and Whole Brain® Thinking produced significant, nearly unprecedented results, including:

- Completion ahead of schedule by 11 days
- Under budget by \$5-6 million
- Excellent safety record
- Employee engagement scores ranking best-in-class in the country
- Power plant recognized with the highest award from the Engineering Council of the State of Texas presented
- American Council of Engineering Companies named it as one of the best-designed plants in the U.S.
- Zero litigation
- Zero vandalism
- Excellent retention rates, keeping the commitment of many highly talented people
- Best crews from the best Subs in Dallas involved because so many were eager to bid on and be a part of the project



“This is one of the most successful public projects in the history of the United States,” Saksen says. “Everything is coming in under budget. The safety record is incredible. The numbers are incredible. Co-location worked brilliantly to grow mutual trust and improve communications and healthy collaboration.”

The project’s leaders agree that they couldn’t have achieved what they did without the culture created from the foundation of servant leadership and Whole Brain® Thinking. Not only were people excited to be coming to work, with strong mutual trust and no hidden agendas, they learned how to stay calm when receiving or delivering bad news and to develop significantly better solutions when challenges arose.

As Mitchell puts it, “We built a \$700 million hospital without screaming and yelling at each other! You have to have the emotional intelligence to collaborate because it’s just too big and too complex to have dictators.”

The leaders attribute their successes to what they learned about how to lead with a higher purpose and motivate a diverse group of highly talented experts to contribute their best to the project.

“I believe it has been the high level of trust that we built in the very beginning with what we learned using the HBDI®, growing a culture based on servant leadership and the Project Delivery Team Vision and Covenant,” Saksen says. “We didn’t just create these together—we kept holding ourselves accountable to this very high standard of collaboration with the help of AMCA.”

Adds David Graham, JV leader and Project Director with Austin Commercial, “Whole Brain® Thinking has significantly improved communication and trust. When we learned that trust is different for each of the four quadrants of the brain, this helped us all rethink how we formed our opinions around trust. It has really improved the many ways we support each other and play to each other’s strengths and balance each other’s blind spots.”

Although construction is complete, the impact of this work continues. Kathy Harper, Vice President of Clinical Coordination for New Parkland Campus, Parkland Health and Hospital Systems, is producing major publishable research—the Pebble Research Project—using the principles of servant leadership in pulling this group together. Taking what the team learned from Whole Brain® Thinking and servant leadership, they now have a monthly call where everyone shares their research and results.

“This is producing unprecedented, pace-setting research done by competitors sharing their intellectual property so that we can eliminate redundancies, share best practices and strengthen findings, really working together for the good of the project to further healthcare,” Harper says. “Part of being a Pebble Project is giving back. That is very significant, a huge part of servant leadership—that we park our ego and stop being competitive and ask, ‘How can we serve the greater good?’”

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