

ANTHONY WILDER DESIGN/BUILD INC.

BUSINESS: Residential architecture and construction

BASED: Cabin John, Md.

FOUNDED: 1995

EMPLOYEES: 30

2008 REVENUE: \$7.7 million

Architectural and building firms were pounded by the housing collapse the past two years. But Anthony Wilder Design/Build, a home-remodeling firm in the Washington, D.C., area, managed to stay intact—even profitable—by teaching employees financial management.

Husband-and-wife founders Anthony and Elizabeth Wilder have shared company financials with employees for years. But while attending an industry conference in 2006, they learned about an open-book management strategy that aims to get employees to think and act like owners.

They hired a coach who helped them better educate and involve their employees in financial decisions. Employees were expected to understand how their work and their department's work affect the bottom line, and seek efficiencies on the job. The company also altered its bonus system so employees get a set portion of net quarterly profits, rather than bonuses based on individual performance. Before, "they didn't have a stake in the outcome," says Ms. Wilder, the company's president. "Now they can feel it, see it, quantify it."



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Anthony Wilder Design/Build stayed intact through the housing crisis by teaching employees financial management

while the Wilders took 50%. Having employees fully understand the financial situation—and seeing the founders make a bigger sacrifice—helped garner support for the cuts, Ms. Wilder says. In April, the company gave out back pay for the months since the cut; down the road, the company hopes to give out back pay for the time since April. What's more, the company has laid off only two employees since the downturn began, and Ms. Wilder says she hopes to offer them their jobs back someday.

Britt Cave, the 44-year-old production assistant manager, says he has taken it upon himself to not keep so many home-repair supplies in stock and to try to cut gas spending. He adds: "It's not because somebody is cracking the whip, but it's because everyone is aware that this affects the bottom line and their own income."

In monthly companywide breakfast meetings, all employees discuss company finances. Employees are asked to speak up about what types of issues they're facing on the job and brainstorm ways to save or generate more revenue. Ideas enacted in recent months have ranged from cutting text-messaging service on company cellphones to taking on smaller-scale remodeling projects.

Last fall, when the economy got really bad, senior managers asked employees to take pay cuts. Most took cuts of 20% to 30%,