

Chandler Design-Build: Building the Field

Michael Chandler started Chandler Design-Build, an award-winning green residential design-build shop, in 1987 in Mebane, NC. He and his wife Beth Williams, who designs the houses, are committed to salary parity, taking home equal paychecks that are no more than 15% higher than their highest paid employee. Careful, high involvement hiring has helped them create an 8-person team to which Chandler expects to one day transition ownership.

All employees – including management – are currently paid on an hourly basis, so that people are compensated based on the actual hours they work. The structure also allows employees the freedom to care for children and other family members during “normal” business hours.

Bonuses and an end of the year “true-up,” when each employee is shown his or her full compensation (including the cost of benefits), add to a culture of accountability. These engagement features, Chandler says, contribute to the tight knit culture of the company – along with a weekly Friday pizza lunch to plan the next week’s projects, jobs in the pipe-line, and other key issues.

Though the boutique firm exemplifies good corporate culture, perhaps its most distinctive feature is what it has been able to grow outside the office because of it.

As a profitable residential builder specializing in environmentally sensitive design, Chandler has been able to teach green building techniques to others, often spending at least two days on the road at events and public education opportunities, promoting sustainability and building the field. He credits his strong and competent team for creating the time he has available to widely disseminate the green building message.

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

Fully engaged employees can manage day-to-day company operations, allowing top management time away from the office to build the field.

