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President's message: Cut the fat, and be more productive

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Contractors and subcontractors by nature tend to be an optimistic group - ready to take risks and always confident of a good outcome. They are also determined to succeed, and with that mind set, are "survivors," often against the odds. These days, it's hard to be optimistic in the commercial building market, with annual volume down by 35 to 50% in many cases, unemployment around 20%, and new projects few and far between. To date, however, few companies have given up and closed their doors. What we hear is that companies have cut back, but are hanging on, waiting for recovery. They may be operating lean, but - on a positive note -- are more productive than they have been in years, putting them in a better competitive position.

At an ASM meeting this week one of our members threw out the million dollar question: When do you think the market will return to the way it was at its peak? It was interesting to hear the variation in responses. For some companies (any that are involved in weatherization), the recovery has already begun; they are busy. For others, they don't see it ever returning to the crazy boom years so recently passed. But for most, they see a steady improvement over the course of the next several years. On average, the 20 subcontractors in the discussion thought we'd be back to where we were in about four to five years. It's a long wait to see if they are right; let's hope it's sooner than that! In the meantime, join us on Feb. 10 to see what construction economist Jim Haughey has to say; let's see if he agrees with the contractors. And stay tuned to ASM for news of several new member benefit programs to be announced shortly, that will help members control costs and stay better informed whatever the economic conditions around us.

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