

## CEP Magazine – June 2018 Meet Thomas Topolski

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an interview by Diana Trevley

**Thomas Topolski** ([thomas.topolski@turntown.com](mailto:thomas.topolski@turntown.com)) is Executive Vice President and Director of Infrastructure for North America at Turner & Townsend in Houston, TX. He was interviewed in March 2018 by **Diana Trevley** ([dianatrevley@sparkcompliance.com](mailto:dianatrevley@sparkcompliance.com)), West Coast Director at Spark Compliance Consulting in Atlanta, GA.

**Thomas Topolski, Executive Vice President, Turner & Townsend**

**DT:** Tom, thanks so much for taking the time to speak with me today. Can you give us some background on your career in the engineering, procurement, and construction (EPC) industry?

**TT:** I started my career in the EPC industry in New York while I was completing my master's degree at NYU. My first job was in 1983. I was hired by Vollmer Associates in New York. The pivotal point in my career came when Bechtel offered me an opportunity in Saudi Arabia. What was originally planned as a two-year assignment in the Middle East stretched into a total of 12 years in various positions in the Middle East North Africa (MENA) region. I returned to the U.S. between 2004 and 2008, then moved back to the Middle East in 2008. I stayed through 2015, and then I was promoted to president of Louis Berger International (LBI) and moved to the international headquarters in Paris. I led the relocation of LBI's headquarters to London in July of 2016, right about the time of Brexit. (I referred to our move as Brenter!) In July 2017, I returned to the U.S. to work with Turner & Townsend, helping the company to expand their presence in the North American infrastructure market.

Working in the EPC industry provided me with an opportunity to travel the world, to experience cultures, and to be involved with incredible projects, many of which were first-of-its-kind and one-of-a-kind projects. I've been able to play a role in the explosive growth in the Middle East, having been involved in groundbreaking projects such as the Riyadh Metro in Saudi Arabia, the Warner Brothers Theme Park in Abu Dhabi, and the Doha Metro in Qatar, to name just a few. I have also had the opportunity to support projects in Asia-Pacific, India, Africa, Europe, and Latin America. With hard work and the right mindset, you can have a wonderful career in the EPC industry and leave a lasting legacy on the built environment.

**DT:** From an executive leadership perspective, why is ethics and compliance important in your industry?

**TT:** In the EPC industry it is absolutely essential to have strong ethical values and to live by those values. The EPC industry is recognized for its commitment to health, safety, and the environment, and I believe that we need to treat ethics, integrity, and compliance with the same level of importance and commitment.

We are responsible for designing and building facilities that the world uses every day. Whether it's a bridge with thousands of daily vehicle crossings or a water system providing clean water to a city with millions of people, infrastructure — and anything in the built environment — that we often take for granted must be designed and built without any shortcuts. It's been proven throughout the world that corruption can lead to shoddy construction, which can lead to deaths and destruction.

Compliance and ethics are also essential from an economic perspective. Your word is your bond. Your clients, employees, partners, and the public must be able to trust the company and, as an extension, the products or

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services that you sell. When a company is caught doing the wrong thing, it is usually not one incident in isolation; rather, it is often a symptom of a larger problem. As such, this becomes an issue for the investors, because enormous amounts of resources — time and money — must be poured into solving the issue rather than creating shareholder value.

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