George Pierson says he has re-structured Kleinfelder to give divisions more autonomy, which he describes as “authority, responsibility and accountability.”

He agreed to meet with Pierson for lunch in Oakland at the request of a recruiter. After a one-hour appointment that stretched on for two hours before the men realized, “We just really hit it off,” Armstrong said. “We share a very similar business philosophy, a lot of the same concepts and values as to how to be successful in this industry and in our first lunch we started talking about ways to make the industry better and ways to make the business better.”

He visited the San Diego office and felt it would be a good cultural fit. “Even though it was a smaller role, there was huge upside potential for this company,” he said. “Getting in an area where I can really make a difference was important. I wanted to really help a company grow and be successful.”

Improving Communication
Armstrong, who runs a team of about 600 people, says one of his main goals is to use the new organizational structure to better communicate to clients the breadth of the services Kleinfelder offers. “We have a lot of really good components in this industry right now,” he said. “The opportunity to get them to work together—that and the fact that we offer a wide variety of services is fairly diversified.”

While one client might turn often to the firm for geotechnical services, they may not be aware Kleinfelder also offers civil engineering, environmental services and cost estimating. “It’s hard sometimes to explain the whole range of what we do,” he said. “Clients know us for one or maybe two services, but not for the full suite of services we offer.”

“Everybody’s got a role to play in the company. It’s about the whole team working together,” he said. “That’s what’s really exciting.”

Resurgence of Talent
Pierson credits Armstrong’s example of the high-caliber of manager Kleinfelder has been able to recruit to be a part of the company’s revitalization. “We’ve had a resurgence of talent coming into the company based on what we’ve done in the last nine months,” Pierson said. “The senior level people we’ve been able to recruit has sent a bit of a buzz around the industry.”

The company’s new chief financial officer, John Murphy, formerly ran the $1.5 billion division within WSP that was created by Parsons’ acquisition. But because of his strong performance at a large firm, says Pierson, “he was a natural fit.”

Kleinfelder employs about 1,800 people. Pierson says that number will grow as the company grows its market. The company notched its biggest sales year ever in 2016. The company is in the process of establishing additional training, programs and benefits for employees from a new employee investment fund, he said. “We’re feeling pretty bullish about our growth,” he said. “We feel quite bullish about our profitability, and we’re feeling pretty optimistic about the future of the company.”