Practice Management Digest

Advancing the Practice of Architecture   **Spring 2013 Issue**

As the Practice Management Knowledge Community, our mission is to advance the practice of architecture through discovering, generating, organizing, and sharing insights, resources, and tools that enable architects to practice more effectively.

Features

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Letter from the Editor
By Deborah M. DeBernard, AIA, NCARB, Architect AIBC, LEED BD+C

Have you ever been asked who you would like as a dinner mate if you could choose anyone in history? With so many people to choose from, narrowing your dinner companion selection to a single individual is difficult. Would it be a world leader, a scientist, a human rights activist, a religious figure or a relative? Are you interested in finding out their secret to success, what failures they overcame or some simple words of wisdom? This digest will treat the readers to just such an opportunity - to learn from some seasoned, successful architects who have sustained their passion for the profession over more than six decades. During this time frame, consider that there were multiple wars, several cycles of economic boom then bust, and discoveries that have changed the way doctors, farmers, manufacturers and students conduct themselves.   So many things have changed significantly and yet the lessons from these learned practitioners is universal and timeless. I've asked each to reflect on their illustrative career and share some **Wisdom from the Ages** with those wishing to learn from their experiences.

I've also asked each author to include a headshot and an image of something they consider important. While the words written here are easily understood, I think it is important that you

know the person whose advice you might follow. While these images will only give you a glimpse, perhaps if you encounter anyone of them at the AIA convention or elsewhere, you will be encouraged to find out more.

- We begin with our elder statesmen, Ewing Miller, FAIA who at 89 is our oldest contributor. He re-lives the transition of his firm in Indiana from the mid-50's to its eventual acquisition by HNTB, covering the introduction of computers and the expansion from five to 50 employees. Read…

- Carolyn Geise, FAIA brings us on a trip covering her role as an architect, activist and developer for a project that shaped the Belltown neighborhood in Seattle. Her words will give confidence to those looking to take on community-based projects. Read…

- Well-known to many through his leadership at RTKL, Harold Adams, FAIA suggests that success can be found in refreshing the basics. In "*Pearls from my Career*", Harold reminds us to focus our efforts on respect and continuous learning. Read…

- From an early childhood experience when his mother brought him to visit with Paul R. Williams, FAIA, Leon Bridges, FAIA, NOMAC knew he could fulfill his dream even though he grew up in an East Los Angeles barrio. "*From a Seasoned Black Architect to Young Professionals Everywhere*", Leon traces the five most important lessons from his career and his life. Read…

- After collaborating from the 70's to today, Basil Acey, AIA and Michael DeBernard, AIA share their insights on the experiences needed to deliver large and complex projects throughout the world. The duo offers a strong message to those architects looking to grow technically, professionally and personally. Read…

- After studying oceanography then history and spending five and a half years as a naval aviator, John Savo, AIA had an experience that opened his eyes to a career in architecture. In "*Confessions of a Late Bloomer*" John thoughtfully reveals the sage advice honed from his wandering path. Read…

- Suman Sorg, FAIA is a designer through and through and also is the eponymous owner of one of the largest woman-owned architecture offices in the US. She discusses how she successfully blends the art and business of architecture. "*Design as the Cornerstone*" describes her philosophy. Read…

- While some architects know from an early age they will become architects, it takes others longer to get to the same point. From his youthful fort building, Richard Hayes, Ph.D., AIA developed a love for construction, space, materials, and habitability but it took years to

fulfill this passion. In his article "*A Life of Questions: Where do I Fit In*?" Richard encourages us to consider our career as a journey without end. Read...

- And finally, Carla Thompson, FSMPS speaks directly to those aspiring to become principals in their firm. "*Pathway to Principal: What They Don't Teach You in Architecture School*" illustrates the skills needed to elevate your experience from employee to owner. Read...

For those that would prefer to download the entire edition: simply click here and take a single PDF with you for ease of printing and reading later.

Upcoming Issue

I want to thank the 2012 Digest editor, Ray Kogan for helping me get started as the new editor. I hope to live up to the high standards he set. For that I will need your help beginning with our next edition. I plan on providing a forum for emerging professionals to have their turn at the microphone. If you fit the criteria (or know someone who does) and have something to share with the AIA PMKC Community, please contact me at ddebernard@dewberry.com. The deadline will be here before you know it so send me your thoughts this week.

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Think Long Range
By Ewing Miller, FAIA

Where to start? First you must know that being next door to ninety years of age, I haven't practiced architecture for fifteen years and so much has changed... but not everything. The mistakes I made and recovered from are still germane today.

Superior Design AND Competency

I became a partner in a five-person firm in 1955 in a smallish town of 60,000 people with two other architectural firms. The firm grew to 50 people and I became the sole proprietor. I wished to present my firm as being superior in design and quickly learned every firm of architects presents themselves as having superior design quality. The client often had a hard time discerning among the interviewees to determine which design portfolio would best suit the project. Then as now, most clients want and expect competency in their building type and a quality design.

And do not assume knowledge about the expectations of a client. Research the client and the project and only respond when you can offer competency as well as superior design credentials. When

trying to break into a new market in which you have limited competency, find the firm that has deep experience in that market and work out an association. Be willing to sacrifice a large percentage of the work to this other firm as an investment in the future. You will then have competency to present along with your design credentials the next time.

Plan for the Future

Architects are poorly schooled in the business of architecture. When I first became a partner there was very little offered by the American Institute of Architects except standardized contracts and membership on national committees. National committees offered the only chance to have candid conversations about business methods with contemporaries who were not in direct competition. Today, there is so much information, with a multiplicity of courses and seminars available. The sharing of information and resultant transformation that has happened in our profession is amazing. Spend several months deciding what business systems makes sense - read, research, discuss - and how you see yourself developing over a five to ten year period *before* setting up your practice,.

Once underway, firms can lose perspective if they expand too quickly and have not given thought to how the business model changes. Revisit your long-range plans periodically so they remain relevant and viable. We live in this fortunate time where business information for the practice of architecture is readily and abundantly available but requires a dedication to filter for the important elements, and then to practice what you learn.

Budget for the Future Too

Long-range planning must also include long-range budgeting. When I started in architecture, the major investment was a drawing table, task light and a T-square. Outfitting an office was not a major undertaking. However as the practice changed and electronic technology emerged, I made a mistake that can still be made today. I learned that when making a major change in either equipment or software, you should remember to budget appropriately and not underestimate the cost of training employees in the office.

I wanted to get into computers early and be on the leading-edge of technology, so I leased a large table computer drafting machine from Hewlett-Packard. However, I did not recognize the time or the overhead cost required to train our employees or include these costs in an evolving budget. Our financial performance was strained. Then there was a sudden downturn in the market in 1983 and I was saddled with both a lease and a machine that no one could use. The lesson here is you need to include a budget in the business plan and revise the budget for every action you take *before* you

take the action. Once there is confirmation that the budget can support the business plan, add a contingency to take care of the unexpected.

Share Decisions

Employees are dedicated, but often become ingrained in how they accomplish their work. While today's offices require greater flexibility because of the frequent changes in technology, it is still important to take the time to help everyone understand the reasons for the change. I had a wonderful specification writer trained by the senior partner in the firm, who was comfortable working in the era of typewritten specifications that were manually edited using white-out, scissors and paste. At a conference, I met a consultant that provided architects with complete specifications on tape which saved making copies and had the capability of making corrections cleanly without using whiteout. This consultant had worked for many architects and was knowledgeable beyond my employee. I was convinced and invested a considerable sum of money purchasing the tape system and proudly turned it over to my writer as a "wonderful thing" that would make his work easier and the specifications better. He never used it. He never left his system of cutting-and-pasting, ignoring the many times I talked about the advantages of the new system. I reluctantly realized that I never included him in the research and decision-making. My lesson - if you choose to remain a small firm you can do as you please, but if you grow you have to share the decisions by bringing others into your thought process early so they feel an ownership of the decision and are vested in making it work. The time spent in this effort will pay dividends.

Hire the "Other Person"

As we expanded I hired and surrounded myself with others who were very much like my personality; a mistake so common to many small ventures. This made for a very compatible office where it was fun to come to work, and where our common traits provided our clients with well-designed solutions. Although we tried hard to develop business methods that would track job costs, we did not pay sufficient attention to that aspect of the practice. We were all concerned more with the design and solution, than whether the decisions were being made to keep the project on track. I learned that when choosing a partner or key hire; choose someone who is different in how they view accomplishment and satisfaction. If you are insistent that projects be profitable, on-time with decisions made quickly and decisively, and then choose someone who excels at forming teams or producing worthy architecture. Likewise, if you lead the design, have an equal who can keep the design group from wandering off-plan. These relationships will be successful when there is an understanding by all that each is needed to have a sustainable firm for the long-term.

Conclusion

Although my mistakes were not irrevocable, they were costly in time and energy to correct. And while the profession is mercurial, building five and 10 year plans that are thoughtful with appropriate budgets and contingencies, involving others in decision-making and hiring a well-rounded suite of colleagues will serve you well regardless of the conditions. Remember that even

though architecture is often the first affected by a recession and the last one to recover, your long-range goals should remain the same. It is an exciting and challenging profession. Make it a little easier by spending time thinking about and researching all aspects of the practice before entering.

About the Author: Ewing H. Miller II, FAIA studied architecture at University of Pennsylvania when his studies were interrupted by World War II. He was a pilot in the European theater and a POW after his plane was shot down. Upon his return, he received B. Architecture and a master's degree in urban planning. His early mentors were Paul Cret, Chair of Design at the University of Pennsylvania and Louis Kahn, a visiting critic.
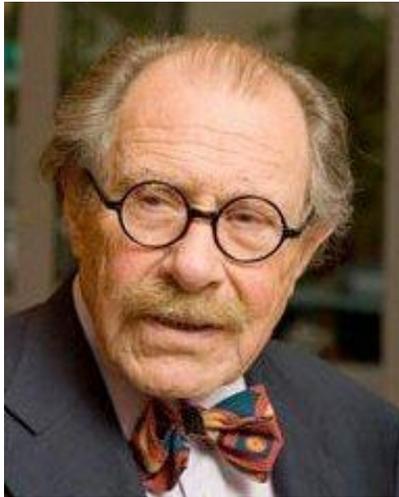
Ewing served as Chair of the AIA Committee on Architecture in Education, Vice President and President of the Central & Southern Indiana AIA Chapter and Director of the Indiana Architectural Foundation. He was a member of the Governor's Commissions on Aging, and Comprehensive Health Planning, the Behavioral Research Foundation, President of the Board of Managers of the Sheldon Swope Art Gallery, and a member of the Board of Directors of the Herron Art Gallery and the Indianapolis Opera. He was past Chairman of the Indianapolis Arts and Cultural Alliance. In 2008, AIA Indiana presented the President's Award to three generations of Indiana Architects from the Miller family: Martin Miller; Warren Miller, FAIA; Ewing H. Miller, AIA; and Ewing H. Miller II, FAIA in recognition of continuous practice covering nearly a hundred years of practice contributing to the important history of the state.

Ewing is retired and currently resides in Washington DC where he continues his civic and architectural involvement.

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Lessons from Belltown
By Carolyn Geise, FAIA

The 1990's brought change to Seattle's Belltown. As an architect/developer and community activist, I had the good fortune to witness and participate in this change as Denny Regrade became the vibrant dense urban neighborhood now called Belltown.

Background

The Denny Regrade, a 216 acre section of Seattle just north of the downtown core, was flattened in the 1930's by sluicing Denny Hill into Elliott Bay. This engineering feat anticipated the horizontal spread of the downtown core but with the Great Depression and then the invention of steel high-rise construction the expansion did not happen when expected. The area lay fallow with mostly parking lots and low-rise commercial buildings for over 50 years. When development finally did

come, it was not office space, but residential towers shaped by zoning providing for 6,000 additional residents by 2014.

In 1992 things began happening around the intersection of Western and Vine as the Belltown P-Patch began. In 1995 I completed the renovation of a 1914 box factory into the mixed use 81 Vine Building. That same year the Banner Building live/work lofts opened across the street. Standing at our corner you could count eight construction cranes. New residents were eager to get to know their new community and the few old timers were wondering what was happening and what they could do to keep the neighborhood livable with thousands of additional residents.

Encouraged by the mayor's promise that a neighborhood accepting density would get new amenities, a group formed around the concept of a green amenity that would use an ecosystem design to handle storm water where it falls, to celebrate natural water processes and to nurture community.

"Growing Vine Street"

The gray October Seattle morning didn't look promising for a gala street party. A few people buzzed around the street barricades putting finishing touches on tables of recycled treasures waiting for shoppers. The importance of showing a community capable of raising $42,000 to match a grant to start the project now called *Growing Vine Street* weighed heavily. The idea was to recognize storm water as a resource to be collected, exposed, enjoyed and integrated into a sustainable development creating a laboratory for ecologically sound solutions in the urban environment. We boldly claimed the full eight blocks of Vine Street as a watershed and began developing design concepts. It would be a linear park connecting the waterfront and community garden into the heart of Belltown; a community driven streetscape and drainage infrastructure. The urban habitat that then supported rats, starlings, pigeons and seagulls would soon support song birds, bees, butterflies and encourage community interaction.

After years of work, the 50 page design concept was accepted by the Design Commission as a guideline for development along Vine Street and two half block demonstration projects were built - the Beckoning Cistern at the 81 Vine Building and the Cistern Steps at the P-Patch.

Lessons learned from the process

Solve world issues locally. While attending the UN International Women's Conference in Beijing in 1995, I was moved by personal stories of women from the third world and felt drawn to help. On return home I realized my effort would be better spent in my own neighborhood where I knew the players and politics and where I would be available for much needed follow-through over many years.

Listen to diverse and multi-generational input. Our working group was diverse - all ages and income levels - college students to retirees, homeless to dot.com millionaires, each bringing their skills to the project. I learned to especially value the young voices. Not yet jaded by regulations, codes and budgets, they were not afraid to aim high and attempt what seemed impossible.

Value everyone involved in the process. Volunteers work their hearts out for projects they believe in, especially when valued, respected and having fun. Communication was a project in itself with the hundreds of volunteers, affected property owners, enthusiastic *and* skeptical neighbors and legions of agencies. A weekly article in the neighborhood newspaper, an e-mail list of hundreds and regular public meetings served to keep the project visible and the team moving ahead together.

Recognize when an idea is ready to fly. The success *Growing Vine Street* achieved was partially due to timing. We introduced new ideas for treating urban storm water before the city was ready to hear them but at a time ripe for change. Environmental issues were gaining traction and water was the big player. Change was inevitable and our project served as the mechanism for change in Belltown. Further it served as a model for change in other areas of the city where similar type projects were easily permitted and constructed after we broke the ice. The lesson here is to recognize when forces are poised and let that energy push your work forward.

Never stop at the first no - bring decision makers together. At one point of apparent impasse, we presented a workshop for city officials from all departments involved in regulating our project. We presented the concept design, served them lunch, and then spent 2 hours strategizing on how to move forward, breaking what had before seemed impenetrable.

Quality of the project matters. We drew in some of the best talent in the city and the ideas were fresh, strong and had staying power. You can spend the same number of hours working on a mediocre idea as a good idea, so choose a good one.

Conclusion

Now back to that gray Seattle morning. The brass band quietly took their seats before an audience of half a dozen. With the first notes of music something magical happened - people began to appear, the sun broke through the clouds, and the neighborhood was suddenly transformed. It was a thrilling moment. We raised $4,000 toward the match that day, eventually received the $42,000 grant and were on our way to designing our water inspired Vine Street.

This year a new building is in design for the missing link between the two completed sections. The Seattle Design Review Board has identified the Design Guidelines of *Growing Vine Street* as requirements for the building and streetscape design. Our plan is working.

About the Author: Carolyn Geise, FAIA practices architecture at Geise Architects in Seattle's Belltown. She developed the 81 Vine Building in Belltown and has served as the volunteer chairperson of the Growing Vine Street Community project since 1994. A professional activist since her architecture student days, when she staffed the AIA booth at Seattle's World's Fair in 1962, Carolyn Geise has served as a gubernatorial appointee to the Washington Board of Registration for Architects and as a member of the AIA's national Ethics Council. Her practice encompasses a wide variety of work including notable residential design and facilities for special user groups such as homeless women and emotionally disturbed children. In 2001, she was presented with AIA Seattle's highest honor, the <u>AIA Seattle Medal</u>.

"Pearls" from My Career
By Harold Adams, FAIA

There are basic themes that I emphasize when I lecture on the subject of Architectural Practice, whether I am at the University of Maryland, College Park or Texas A&M. My audience can be architectural students or construction science students - my message is the same. To succeed in the practice of architecture you need to remember the basics of successfully extending into the world of clients and colleagues through respect and continuous learning. There can be many variations to these themes and there can be more sophisticated approaches once the basics are mastered but it pays to focus on these standards until they become the foundation of your approach.

"Get Work" AND "Do Work"

Some architects focus on "doing the work" to the near exclusion of "getting the work". It is an easy conclusion to draw that some of the most influential designers in our midst were less involved with business development. Frank Gehry, Phillip Johnson, Louis Khan, Marcel Breuer and others could easily let their designs speak for them and yet after working with them, I know all of them to be incredible salespersons. They each were great communicators, and friendly with everyone. While RTKL was working with Phillip Johnson, he and I went to lunch at the Mayflower in Washington DC. I was so impressed that as he entered each room of the hotel he chatted with everyone; the valet, maître d', servers, guests who recognized him. It showed me how he would also treat clients.

It is a core belief for me that a strategic, focused, active business development and marketing set of activities for getting the work is critical to attracting clients and influencing their decision to hire you. All staff needs to be educated about the importance of their business development contribution, from the receptionist at the front door to the lead designer to the least experienced intern on the project team.

An active business development mindset is more than being knowledgeable about the firm's work. Each employee should recognize that their attitude, dress, word choice, and communication style is an opportunity to promote what is important for others to know about the firm. The entire team should be encouraged to play an active and variable role, sometimes answering the phone, sometimes developing the design concept. In today's competitive world, no opportunity to intersect with clients can be seen as a mundane action. Everything leads to getting the work.

Learn About the Business of Clients

Clients trust architects to effectively manage a great deal of money. Learning about their business greatly enhances the ability to use those funds wisely and build trust with clients. So architects need to be curious about our client's business , read what they read (Forbes, Fortune Magazine, The Wall Street Journal, Bloomberg News etc.), and learn to speak their language.

Some years ago I developed the habit of reading the business section of the WSJ early in the morning. I read that Sears was considering a major renovation program for their stores in the US. By 10am that same day, I had assembled a team at RTKL and a consulting firm specializing in major national retail renovation programs, called Sears and later was awarded the contract. It wasn't simply reading about the opportunity. We understood the retail business and what would drive not only the imagination but also the budget of the Sears team. When architects understand bonding/funding challenges, risk issues, business cycles, return on investments, cost of capital, underlying investment strategies and other business concepts, we are learning how our clients think and operate their businesses. We are then better prepared to help solve their problems.

Treat Everyone with Respect

Treating others with respect is a lesson that children learn at an early age so it is surprising how often we need to be reminded that a reputation is a palpable ingredient. Listening to others' ideas, generosity with your time, sharing full credit, recognizing how much others have contributed to

your success, paying attention to what is important to your colleagues/clients and your willingness to pass on your skills to others, all play a role in how your reputation develops and lingers. You cannot predict the complicated path of how your reputation will be communicated from one person to the next, so creating enemies in the business world or leaving a firm in poor stead is not a wise choice. It is a certainty that a respectful approach will generate references for a position or project somewhere in your future. Architecture is a "people business" so even though the business has changed since I first started, it is still "people" who know us, trust us and make the decision to hire an architect.

Build Effective Teams

While there is a lot written about team building, it is important to note that the firm's leaders and managers have an enormous responsibility to ensure that there are not only policies written to support a place where people want to come to work but that these policies translate into everyday practices. A great business is one where everyone feels they can be successful including colleagues, consultants, contractors and vendors. Spend time nurturing an environment where people are empowered to be creative, curious, truth-seeking, and respectful. You can never learn enough about working with people.

Be Conversant with Design-Build

Some architects work closely with General Contractors (GC) and others do not. I highly recommend embracing the construction industry and improving your relationships with the GCs on your projects. Understand labor, material costs, methods of construction, requirements for bonding, subcontracting, reducing exposure and team building. While you might not be ready to take a leadership role in construction management, you could take a minority role with a compatible GC firm as a means to improve your skills and capacity. This is not an area to shy away. As the first architect to chair the Design-Build Institute of America (DBIA), I found that architects have a lot to learn if they aspire to be the leader of the Design-Build team.

There are many lessons to apply as you navigate through a career in architecture. I am humbled that my experiences and opportunities have served my career so well and that I have had a chance to learn and re-learn the importance of treating people well and learning more about their concerns so that I could bring creative and interesting architectural solutions to bear.

About the Author: Harold Adams, FAIA served as CEO/Chairman of RTKL until his 2004 retirement. He received the AIA Kemper Award, Tau Sigma Delta National Honor Society of Architecture and Allied Arts Gold Medal and Max O. Urbahn Award for Achievement in Architecture, and was the Chancellor of the AIA College of

Fellows. Adams serves as director of Dewberry, Legg Mason, Lincoln Electric Holding, and Commercial Metals Corporation.

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From a Seasoned Black Architect to Young Professionals Everywhere
By Leon Bridges, FAIA, NOMAC

I welcome telling my story of over 50 years in the field of architecture with a hope that I might provide some guidance to those who follow in my footsteps. My footsteps are not shallow; they contain both successes and failures. But by God's Will I am still practicing architecture and am grateful to be able to impart a certain degree of wisdom.

As a young child, my Mom observed me drawing pictures of houses and she thought I could benefit by being introduced to Paul R. Williams, FAIA, a much heralded architect in California who was the first African-American admitted into the AIA and later the first African-American to be elevated to Fellowship. What a giant he was! That introduction, at 12 years of age, opened my eyes to the possibilities of becoming an architect. And yet, I was a youngster, born in the East Los Angeles Barrio of Boyle Heights. Who was I to dream of becoming an architect? However, because of Mr. Williams, my first mentor, and my Mom, this dream became reality.

Find a Mentor and Work Hard

If you are in school, be it primary, middle school, high school or college, you need a mentor! Find one. Follow and learn from them. This is your first most important lesson. In this process, become the best you can be and God will reward you for your efforts. As a student, study long and hard, live in the library, read periodicals, and make lasting friendships, especially with those who have the same aspirations as you. Join the National Organization of Minority Architects Students (NOMAS) chapter and the American Institute of Architects Students (AIAS) chapter. Become an active member and attend their conventions. Keep in mind that sleep is not on your agenda, and neither is serious dating and other diversions of your time - your second most important lesson. And yet you should broaden your understanding of the world, travel, learn another language, study art and music, physics, chemistry and math. Take a course in accounting or business management. While I favor a five year Bachelor of Architecture curriculum over the hybrid 4+2 and other similar degrees, whatever you do, complete a professional degree from an accredited architectural program.

Choose Where you Work with Care

If you are looking to join a firm, choose one that allows you to become an accomplished practitioner - <u>your third most important lesson</u>. I prefer a smaller firm, however, you can learn much in a larger firm if you find a mentor in the firm, (see the first most important lesson above), and indicate to them that you want to learn as much as possible. Then, embrace your assignments with enthusiasm by learning as much as you can about your assigned projects and their clients. Be neat in your work habits, your dress, and surroundings; it will impress your employers and your colleagues.

Develop Friendship that can become Partnerships

After a while you might want to start your own firm. And you may want to start the firm as a sole practitioner, but having a partner (or two) is <u>your fourth most important lesson</u>. Working as a sole practitioner puts a lot of pressure on you to know everything…design, business, quality, risk management, client management, employee relations…and you don't! A partnership gives you a soul mate with whom you can share ideas about design, about running the business, and - very importantly - it allows you to take a vacation without worries. Remember, my earlier advice that you should find a friend in college that shares your aspiration?

Recognize that you are not Succeeding Alone

I feel very strongly that if you believe in yourself and your ability, you will be successful. But only if you know that there is another force, I prefer to name it God, who is always by your side and working on your behalf. Recognize that being successful is not measured in the amount of money earned or other tangible measurements. I know because I have made a lot of money in my professional life. I was inducted into the AIA College of Fellows (FAIA) and the NOMA Council (NOMAC), and I was awarded the Whitney M. Young Award (the second highest medal given by the AIA). I have received many accolades for design excellence and my peers treat me with respect. However my real success comes because God granted me the privilege of being married to the same marvelous woman for over 50 years; of having four wonderful children and two wonderful grandchildren. God has also given me the opportunity to co-found the AIA Scholarship Fund for Minority and Disadvantaged Students which has provided scholarships for hundreds of high school youngsters; to sponsor winners of the architectural competitions in the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People(NAACP) national Academic, Cultural, Technical & Scientific Olympics (ACT-SO) Program; to see those who have received these scholarships and awards go on to establish their own architectural firms; and to share my experiences with bright students enrolled in the School of Architecture & Planning at Morgan State University. I could not have done any of these things without the help of my family, my mentors, my partners and most importantly God. My <u>fifth and final most important lesson</u> is to always know that there is God and a host of helpers who are rooting for you. Do not let them down.

And yes, I have had my share of failures. I started a very successful architectural practice in Seattle,

Washington in 1963, but in 1972, I decided to branch out to Baltimore, Maryland. That move cost me a partnership with my most beloved companion, Edward Burke, FAIA, FAICP, with whom I had graduated from the University of Washington, School of Architecture. I have made other mistakes too, some large, some small. It is not necessary to list them all. Just know that the fact that I, as a first-time entrepreneur, have been able to survive, even thrive, means that *whatever* your background is, you too can be successful.

Oh, I have had a great run and am tremendously thankful to God and others who have and continue to assist me along the way. So my advice is to work hard, find a mentor, choose the company (both personally and professionally) with whom you travel with care, and recognize the greater forces in the world. My wish for you is that you also have fun in life and know that although I do not know you personally, I am rooting for you.

About the Author: Leon Bridges, FAIA, NOMAC, earned his B. Arch. from University of Washington (1960) and an MBA from Loyola College of Maryland (1984). He founded *Leon Bridges AIA* in Seattle, later relocating to Baltimore, where he became Maryland's first registered African American architect. Bridges served on the AIA National Board of Directors (1971, 1983-85) and was elected as a Vice President in 1986 and in every national office for NOMA. He co-founded the AIA/Ford Minority Scholarship Fund. Bridges' work has garnered more than twenty awards for design excellence. Currently, Bridges is a lecturer at Morgan State University.

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A Lifetime of Collaboration

By Basil Acey, AIA (Retired) and Michael DeBernard, AIA, NCARB

Editors Note: Basil Acey and Michael DeBernard collaborated over four decades. They have had successful and productive careers as architects and as friends. When asked what contributes to this success, their answer was inevitably tied to the following four 'skill-sets':

- Understand and control project risk
- Establish a clear vision of objectives tied to each project assignment
- Achieve promised commitments and meet all client expectations
- Develop, then Maintain, an exceptional level of interpersonal trust

Background

Our working collaboration began in 1974 and has included a very broad range of project assignments throughout the US and internationally. Both our careers began in small offices where exposure to the broad fundamentals of the architectural practice - design, CD production,

development of project specifications, and on-site construction experience - was a necessity due to the limited number of staff based in each organization.

That common professional foundation served us well as we each moved from small, regionally-focused offices to a series of large A/E firms with highly recognized national and international portfolios. Our roles within these large A/E firms required our transition from project architects to practice management with an increasing responsibility for project administration and oversight, marketing, and financial performance - all influenced by the developing skill-sets outlined herein. While these skill-sets were not uniquely applied to either small or large firms, they became more difficult to implement and control as our firms' geographical and global presence expanded. These new opportunities not only brought projects with a broader range of technical and climatic considerations but were also heavily influenced by project requirements imposed by political and jurisdictional entities, initially unfamiliar to us, through 'new' building regulations and construction laws reflecting cultural traditions substantially different from those we had routinely experienced throughout the US.

Accordingly, over our many project collaborations we developed, then refined, skills that would ensure we met performance expectations, identified and mitigated project risks, and met all commitments made to our clients, fellow team members, and firm management.

Understand and Control Project Risk

We understood the need to recognize, then mitigate, the potential for risk as early as the onset of the "go-no go" decision ensuring that the project was foremost within the firm's area of expertise. As managers, we took care to assess each of the metrics outlined in the Requests for Qualifications to ensure we could meet the client's expectations permeating the invitational documents.

Following selection, but prior to scope and fee negotiations, we completed a rigorous analysis of all risks and liabilities with any potential for negatively impacting project performance. Each analysis identified mitigation plans tailored to each risk identified. Those plans highlighted specific actions to be taken when a project risk was first encountered, drawing upon the team's core strengths and capabilities. More than two billion dollars in projects, across a broad international geography, involving the full range of delivery methodologies, were completed without incident over our 34 year collaboration

Establish a Clear Vision of Objectives Tied to Each Project Assignment

The scale of many of our projects demanded the involvement of an expanded design team which typically included multiple specialty consultants directly supporting the core architectural and engineering team components and often involved project-specific partnerships with developers and/or constructors within a design-build delivery framework. Often the composition of our project teams included specialty consultants or local architectural and engineering partners with little or no shared project experiences either between themselves, with our core team members, or

with our clients. The lack of established working relationships between many of the team members at project start-up was quickly offset by the formulation and communication of a very clear vision of project objectives and performance expectations tailored to each team member.

We met with each team member prior to the commencement of their services (and often prior to the initiation of scope and cost negotiations), to develop and codify our project scope and performance expectations. Then, regularly over the life of the project, we met to assess the team's performance and to evaluate the quality of our on-going services; we routinely met with each team member to affirm their continuing ability to meet their assigned scope and schedule commitments; and where necessary, adjustments were made across the team to ensure the interdisciplinary coordination and promised informational hand-offs between the team's member firms occurred as planned.

Through this process, we produced, distributed, and routinely updated the 'project vision', in written format, to include the following major topics:

- Scope and schedule parameters necessary to meet the project's objectives and performance milestones.
- Service and product quality expected of each member firm over the duration of the project.
- Roles and responsibilities, specifically tailored to each member firm.
- Work Breakdown Structure clearly assigning scope responsibilities to each member firm, thus assuring our team's full compliance with the project's stated parameters. This document allowed us to avoid the duplication and overlap of services being provided by the team's member firms and provided us with an effective tool to identify out-of-scope effort and potential 'scope creep' before those services impacted our project budgets.
- Checklists defining milestone quality and performance reviews thus ensuring our team's "products" consistently met the project's (and client's) stated goals and objectives.

- On-going development of remedial action plans when we determined that the team's activities were no longer in synch with the project's goals and objectives.
- Project Plan that clearly defined expected project costs (directly tied to the Work Breakdown Structure), distributed and tracked compensation due each member firm (by milestone and by total fee), and provided an effective tool for identifying and resolving out-of-scope services prior to their initiation.

Achieve Promised Commitments and Meet All Client Expectations

Prior to the start of design services, we routinely scheduled a project kick-off meeting focused on identifying and prioritizing our client's expectations, recapping those highlighted in the RFP, and formalizing any new commitments that would have resulted from the scope and fee negotiations. To ensure success, the full project team, including specialty consultants, participated along-side our client's representatives in developing the promised commitments. The formal document that resulted from this meeting – a 'road map' to be adopted by the entire team - committed each team member firm to specific actions and responsibilities over the life of the project. This 'road map' was essential to the success of our projects as it allowed us to manage the project team in meeting its schedule, cost, and quality commitments. The 'road map' was routinely reviewed in all project meetings and prior to the conclusion of each project milestone to ensure the commitments that we promised were performed to the satisfaction of our client.

Of course, promised commitments must be realistic, achievable within the project parameters, and flexible as conditions change warranting a revision to the plan. Program requirements and project personnel might change, delivery schedules might adjust, and/or milestone submittals might be repackaged to meet the evolving project priorities. However, in all cases, we maintained an effective and routine line of communication using the updated 'road map' to balance our client's expectation with the evolving conditions and convey new information between our teams and our clients so that issues were resolved in a timely manner and to the benefit of all parties.

Build Interpersonal Trust

Trust is a value best built between two individuals over time, tempered through real life experiences.

Our collaboration has made possible that which could not have been accomplished by either one of us alone. Our collaboration benefited from the different skills we each brought to our partnership and the common experiences and know-how we both gained from each of the many projects we performed.

The time spent working together, solving difficult problems and relishing in our successes, has cemented our relationship. We know our individual strengths and respect each other tremendously. Our trust grew quickly because we began with a similar approach to architecture, to clients and to projects. We are often accused of being "two peas in a pod", yet it has been the

development of these skill-sets that proved to be absolutely critical to fully achieving the objectives of each client that we served.

Conclusion

'Collaborative partnerships' are business arrangements wherein the participants voluntarily engage in a professional relationship for the purpose of achieving financial, aesthetic, and other mutual benefits without the legal obligations entailed in the more formal aspect of 'partnership' or other corporate entities. While there are principles of professional practice involved in establishing a collaborative partnership, it is bound only by the terms and conditions agreed upon between the principals, such as a defined scope of services, schedule of activities , financial expectations, and a common commitment to perform certain tasks and services expected of each party to the collaboration.

A collaborative partnership may offer the opportunity to engage in a business plan with others in similar or related professional practices such as engineering, interior design, landscaping, and even development and design-build entities without having to formulate a legal obligation and extensive up-front consultation with accountants, attorneys and other professional advisers.

Formal agreements that entail professional obligations are contractual, and each participant should possess - or obtain - professional advice on the potential impact of the collaboration on one's economic and professional career.

If the relationship is built upon appropriate skill-sets that each participant has and uses, and if a mutual trust exists between participants, then the collaborative entity can produce personal, professional and financial rewards.
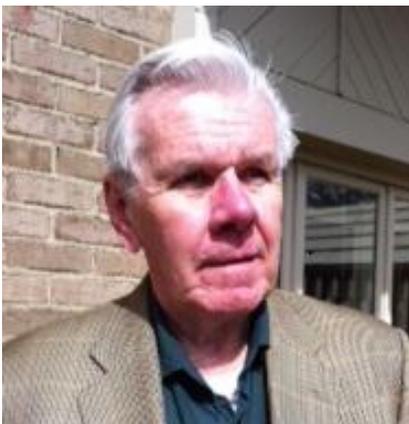
About the Authors: A graduate of The University of Virginia, Basil Acey, AIA (retired) received his architectural license in Illinois in 1967. He worked in Chicago (1963-1972) and Baltimore (1972-2001) serving as Chief Architect for the Baltimore Metro from 1972 through 1979. He retired from DMJM in 2001, going on to consult with HOK and NBBJ.

Michael DeBernard, AIA is the Managing Principal of his firm, Michael DeBernard Architect, PLLC. A graduate of Virginia Tech, he received his initial architectural license in Maryland in 1974. Michael served in various senior assignments for DMJM (Division Manager, Washington DC Office; Practice Operations Manager, DMJM Architecture), HOK (Director of Operations, HOK Aviation), NBBJ (Director of Operations,

NBBJ Aviation and Transportation Group), and Leo A Daly (Corporate International Director).

Basil and Michael collaborated together on numerous major building programs between 1974 and 2008, for the firms DMJM, HOK, and NBBJ.

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Confessions of a Late Bloomer
By John Savo, AIA

I started late as an architect because I knew almost nothing about the built environment for far too long. There was nothing in my family history or public schooling to introduce me to the story of architecture. My first university studies were in oceanography. My first degree was in history. I spent the next five and a half years as a naval aviator during the Vietnam War. However, before sending me to the war zone, the Navy sent me on deployment to the Mediterranean Sea where my world view changed dramatically.

Our first port-of-call, Barcelona, Spain, was a revelation. I was in awe of my first European city. Seeing for the first time what a built environment could become, set me on a new course. Cities became my textbooks. My squadron mates began to joke about "Savo's walking tours" of Naples, Cannes, Athens, etc. But before leaving Barcelona, I had already written my new bride and shared that I wished to become an architect. Neither of us have had a reason to regret that decision. I remain as excited about the possibilities of architecture as I was during that first visit to Barcelona.

Since I joined the profession later than most, I was convinced I needed to accelerate my learning. I became intent on quickly bridging the gap between my experience and that of my colleagues who had been practicing for eight or more years. My impatience, and my focus on continual learning, taught me these lessons:

Architecture is as much a Calling as a Profession

Although I started late, I had all the enthusiasm of a new convert. That was good thing. Architecture is particularly subject to the ups and downs of the economy, and it takes genuine fortitude to stay in the profession during the down times. Invest in internships and apprenticeships to build a strong foundation. Be patient.

Have Laptop, will Travel

Much is to be learned in different natural, cultural and professional environments. Be willing to leave firms as you advance in your skills, especially if your growth is not being supported by your

current employer. I found that practice in New York City and Boston was substantially different than in Seattle, but these differences provided valuable perspective later when working in a national firm with international clientele. Travel and see firsthand how other people live and work. Be touched by great works *in situ*.

Who you Work for is Critical for your Growth

Following the example of my architectural heroes, I strove to work for people whose work I most admired. Our field is rife with iconic examples: Louis Sullivan with Frank Furness, Frank Lloyd Wright with Sullivan, Marcel Breuer with Walter Gropius, Le Corbusier with Auguste Perret and later with Peter Behrens. So I knocked on the doors of the firms I most admired. Some turned me away, but a few hired me. My early experiences working in high energy, quality firms greatly advanced my appreciation and knowledge of architecture – and it also gave substance to my resume.

Try Everything on the Menu

Don't specialize too early. It is impossible to know and appreciate all the possible roles of an architect unless you actually experience them. I thought I would be happy designing custom homes, but soon learned that I felt most fulfilled working as part of a multidisciplinary team engaged in complex, large-scale work. I thought I would focus on new work, but found great satisfaction in preservation and adaptive reuse projects. Unexpectedly, I found construction documentation and administration as rewarding as master planning and concept design. It takes time to learn your strengths and know where you best fit.

Do not Delay Becoming a Registered Professional

I took the ARE exam with two hundred of my "closest friends" in a New York City armory. The process of registration has thankfully become more convenient, but I doubt that it is any easier – and I know that it only becomes more difficult with time. Although becoming licensed may not lead to immediate promotion or an increase in salary, lack of timely registration will impede your career and reduce your options.

Being Rooted in a Place is a Good Thing

There is such a thing as *genius loci* and you ignore it at your peril. Knowing the place and the local rules gives you a running start and
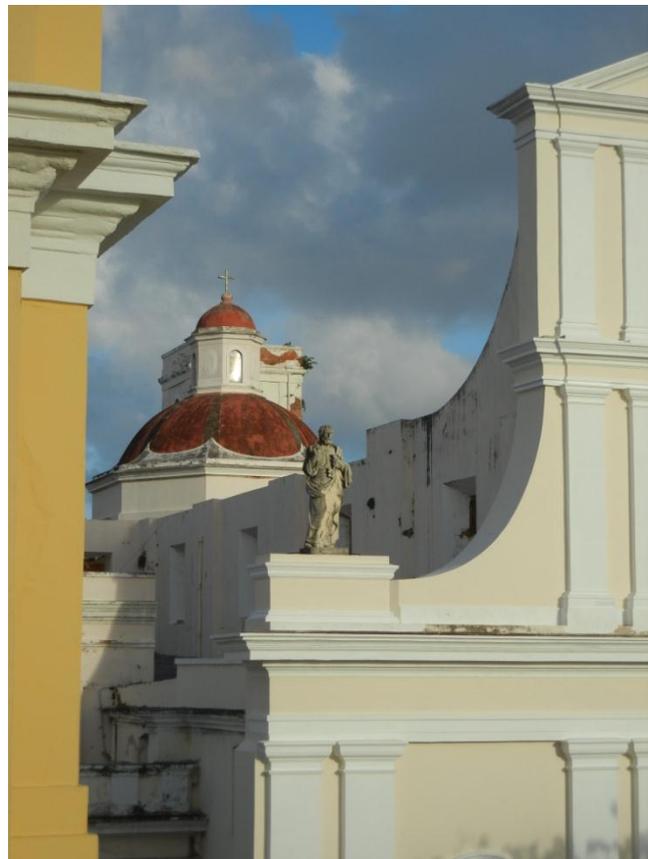
your work will be better suited to its context. While not guaranteeing better design, local knowledge greatly increases the odds that you will avoid costly mistakes. It is especially important to understand the regulatory environment. Your mastery of local land use codes and design guidelines can make or break your ability to deliver the project you imagine.

Partner for Mutual Success

A genuine synergy is possible when you engage with complimentary individual(s) whom you respect and trust. Partnering raises the level of your game. This is as true in a large practice as it is in a small one, and at all levels of experience. Others can see it, not just peers but also clients. It is important to recognize the phenomenon when it comes along and to nurture it.

Relationships not only Matter…They are Everything

Most of your work *should* come from repeat clients. For this to happen, you must be top of mind to your clients and they must perceive you as a trusted advisor with unquestionable integrity. A number of people modeled this for me, none more than William Bain, Jr., FAIA, who hired me at NBBJ and remains an important mentor today. Equally important are the relationships with your colleagues in the building arts, including fellow architects, consultants, contractors, etc. Ours is a small community, often with unexpected connections between professionals in far flung places – as I learned yet again on my recent trip to New Delhi.

Modeling is Great, but Mock-ups are Better

Prove it to yourself before making an impassioned argument in front of a client, especially when you are doing something for the first time. There is no substitute for the actual "thing" crafted to actual dimensions. Don't simply rely on standards and rules of thumb – know the answer from personal experience. Complex building projects can require multiple full-scale visual and performance mock-ups using actual materials. Recently, we carved out part of our office for full-scale mock-ups of workplace environments proposed for a client. It paid for itself immediately, when a resistive facility operator could experience the solution and subsequently became an enthusiastic supporter of the design.

Engage in Your Community and You will Reap as Much as you Give

Join the AIA or serve on a Design Review Board and advance the profession, but also selectively join with your neighbors–many of whom you'll discover to be your present or future clients–to improve your community by joining a non-profit board, your local Community Council, Rotary Club or Chamber of Commerce. For me, it was an organization called *Leadership Tomorrow* that gave me the confidence to become more publically involved. There is much need in our communities for the skills and hard-won wisdom of architects. You will be appreciated, and it will deepen you as a person as well as a professional.

One Last Thought

Remember that architecture is first and foremost a product of imagination. Continually build your knowledge base and technical skills, design sustainable buildings and address social inequity, but also remember that architecture is a building art rather than a science. Revel in coloring outside the lines.

About the Author: John Savo is a principal at NBBJ and a leader in the firm's commercial and corporate practice. A generalist, John has delivered a wide range of projects, including high-rise and mid-rise office and residential buildings, mixed-use projects, public infrastructure, corporate and institutional master plans, and historic building rehabilitations. John has been a part-time instructor at the Boston Architectural Center, the University of Washington and The Art Institute of Seattle and is currently on the Board of Directors of Leadership Tomorrow, the South Lake Union Community Council and the South Lake Union Chamber of Commerce for which he served as President in 2012. John is also Chair of the Citizens Advisory Committee for Seattle University.

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Design as the Cornerstone
By Suman Sorg, FAIA

In an era of ever greater consolidation of architecture firms into multi-discipline A/E conglomerates and a still lagging economy, it can be a struggle for the design-focused practice to compete, or simply stay afloat. Juggling a myriad of issues –lower fees, fewer opportunities, heightened competition, staying abreast of the digital revolution, retaining skilled staff, to name a few –can easily distract design principals from focusing on developing a body of design work. However, from this vantage, there are ideas that can be incorporated into a practice to bring a greater chance of success.

Design as a Goal

Codify design as a firm-wide goal. As principals of small and medium-sized firms, our practices follow the courses

we chart, consciously or unconsciously. Keeping a disciplined focus on design goals can be achieved by:

- Creating business plans that clearly define goals, objectives and strategies
- Selectively accepting project commissions
- Investing in design tools
- Having confidence in a design process that suits your individual style
- Working to obtain visibility through design awards, exhibitions, competitions and getting work published

These efforts can help prevent or reduce the drift that can occur when revenue is over-valued to the detriment of design goals. Of course you must first stay open for business so balancing ideals with the realities of being responsible business owners is critical.

Finding Design Opportunities

Let's be realistic, not every commission is a design gem. But projects with program, budget, schedule, and aesthetic constraints do not have to derail the process of engaging and evolving highly skilled design abilities. Find design opportunities in every project, no matter the type or scale. This is not always easy, but the good news is today's American consumer of architecture is highly sophisticated and, more and more often, *expects* good design. The relatively recent phenomenon of design as a commodity that enhances a project's overall value has begun to influence clients from real estate developers to municipal bodies. In the same way as sustainable design has been advanced in American society over the past decade, architects can forward this pro-design momentum by serving as educators for our clients by demonstrating that good design does not always mean more expense, but often leads to innovation and an increase to the client's bottom line.

Keeping Up with Design Tools

As design principals and business leaders, it is incumbent upon us to stay abreast of new developments in the profession to remain competitive. This means investing in design tools such as 3D imaging, animations, 3D printing, and research. These tools can help small design firms compete with more established peers. Fortunately, maximizing these design tools is now easier and less expensive.

In addition to arming ourselves with the current tools and skilled teams needed to produce good work, design principals need to keep up with the definition of "design" , "design excellence" or "good design" itself. We seldom spend time contemplating how the perception of design quality is changing across the profession. Design is no longer just about pretty forms. It includes building performance, environmental stewardship, lifecycle costs, technology, ease of maintainability, and context, among other facets. The evolution of this definition means that, as principals, we need to take an all encompassing approach to pursuing design. To achieve good design, I advocate an

integrated, research-based approach that rigorously engages the full spectrum of project specifics with an intuitive, inspirational process.

Owning your Design Process

Trends in architecture are not just related to building design. These trends infiltrate design process just as insidiously and this can have the effect of unbalancing design principles at the core of what we do - the way we design buildings. Over the course of my career I've alternately thought, "I don't have language to describe my design process", "My process is intuitive and can't be explained," or "Maybe I don't have a process at all!" What I have realized over the years is that my design process "is what it is" and try as I might to change that, I can't. The way I design is neither wholly research-based, nor wholly intuitive. The way I work lands somewhere in between, is modulated for each commission, and has changed over time. So I may as well own it. And owning it is the key: gaining confidence in the way I design buildings has been instrumental in my ability to hone the focus of my firm's design goals.

Getting Visibility

Gaining visibility for your design work is a multi-pronged, long-term process. Avenues for getting the word out about your firm's work include submitting for design awards, being featured in the press, and exhibiting your work. Success in these efforts is dependent on the coordination of two facets: research and relationships. There are myriad awards for design supported by professional associations, government entities and others. Crafting a winning strategy entails conducting detailed, ongoing research on which awards are relevant to your project, deadlines for entry, and past winners to estimate the potential of success. Similarly, since the number of print and online press outlets has increased exponentially, creating and maintaining a focused press list, including publications, contacts, and editorial calendars and crafting story pitches is a must. But research alone is not enough. Establishing and maintaining relationships with the press and getting involved with design-oriented professional organizations is critical. After all, if you don't promote your work, no one else will.

Conclusion

There is no established roadmap for the practice led by a design principal. We try our best to be both dedicated artists and keen business people even when these two come into conflict. The only way I know how to try to keep these forces in balance is to orient as much about my practice as possible toward my design goals - from building firm culture and structure, to the team I have formed, to the projects I pursue, to gaining visibility, to investing in design resources, to consciously finding design opportunities in each and every commission. And, for me, it has been both rewarding and frustrating every day for the last 26 years.

About the Author: Suman Sorg, FAIA is the principal and founder of Sorg Architects, located in Washington, DC and New Delhi, India. Suman's work encompasses award winning designs for civic, educational, multi-family residential and commercial projects. Suman inspires her project teams with a strong commitment to thoughtful design and her work explores an extended context and is concerned with the human experience of architecture. She has lectured extensively for the AIA, the National Building Museum, the Urban Land Institute, the State Department and the National Trust for Historic Preservation. Suman currently sits on the board of the Washington DC Building Industry Association, is a Peer Reviewer for the General Services Administration (GSA) Design Excellence Program, and serves on the advisory committee for the Beverly Willis Architecture Foundation.

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A Life of Questions: Where do I Fit In?

By Richard L. Hayes, AIA, Ph.D.

What works for one person does not necessarily work for another in terms of education and career paths. Experience can be a harsh as well as glorious teacher and certainly different for each person. To find the right path, one must continually ask questions and stay engaged. My advice is to consider your career as a journey without an end.

My particular career started with tree and brush forts constructed during endless summers. My interest in construction, space, materials, and habitability was well established by the time play evolved into school with the wonder of those forts never going away. For me, high school included work due to family finances, so a daily cycle began of going to school to work to school that continued throughout college.

For the last few semesters of college, I worked for a "big E little A" firm as a construction inspector. Even though a recession was in the air, I had worked hard and full time employment was offered after I completed a bachelor's degree in Business Administration and Mathematics. What an accomplishment!

After a few months in the position I had a conversation with a colleague where we both expressed a desire to go to architecture school. It was clear

to me however that my colleague was a soul filled with children, mortgage, car payment, washer/dryer and no lottery winnings. While my colleague grappled with this, I made a decision to reengage in my early wonder, along with the cycle of school to work to school, and entered architecture school. While school was a rewarding endeavor, a thought nagged – is this "architecture thing" the correct path? A sabbatical of sorts resulted where I spent time with Minoru Yamasaki and experienced the beauty of details. Alas, my unfinished degree called and with it a return to working in the corn and soy bean fields of Illinois.

Upon graduation I traveled for a bit to the East Coast and New Zealand. Passing back through Illinois I chanced a position as a research architect for a construction laboratory. Rewarding work on a number of unusual building types was a mainstay. However the ivory tower called again and I applied to The Georgia Institute of Technology for a Doctor of Philosophy program in architecture. Luckily I was accepted and spent the next several years on the familiar school - work - school path.

With a Ph.D. from Georgia Tech finally in hand, the world opened up as did other full-time positions and part-time teaching in private and public architectural related school settings. My architectural repertoire included buildings large to small, municipal to military, commercial to residential as well as historic and mundane. For me, schools were not only designed, but experienced as student and teacher. Eventually, I obtained architectural licenses in four states and an NCARB certificate, but given my serendipitous path much documentation and tenacity was required. I had finally arrived.

Then an epiphany happened; the realization of being too academic to be a practitioner and too practical to be an academician. The best place then was a situation where I could support architects and architecture and continue to enjoy my wonder. After 14 years with the AIA, I have not had any regrets.

So what was the factor that carried me through the years? Since 1987, I have kept a desk blotter type hard copy calendar, where each new month in a blank day I write the following:

<div align="center">

Zero in on Goals
Enhance talent with additional training
Rely on my own experience and judgment
SUCCESS

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What this means to me is a way to stay engaged and dwell in possibilities. Each month (and many times in between) I revaluate goals and wishes through those four lines. After all, I'm not finished yet with this invention and would invite you too to define your own path to its endless destination.
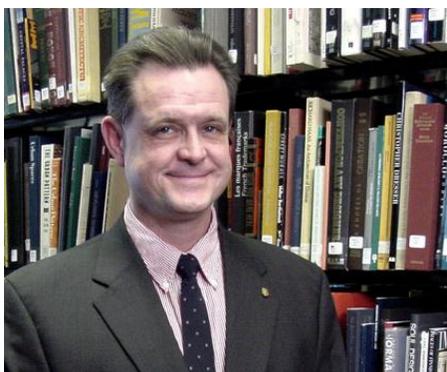
About the Author: Dr. Richard L. Hayes, AIA is Director of Knowledge Resources for the American Institute of Architects in Washington DC where he develops, directs, and identifies emerging topics in the profession of architecture.

For the last 12 years Dr. Hayes has run the AIA's Research for Practice Program that includes the Upjohn Research Initiative. Current projects include The Architect's Handbook of Professional Practice 15th edition, Architectural Graphic Standards 12th edition as well as overseeing the AIA's Architect's Knowledge Resource Program for aia.org.

Previously he was with the Center for Public Buildings of The Georgia Institute of Technology on assignment to the Naval Facilities Engineering Command Headquarters serving as their Chief Historic Architect. He has also been the Director of an Architecture Department for a private sector firm and a Research Architect for the Construction Engineering Research Laboratory of Champaign, Illinois.

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Pathway to Principal: What They Don't Teach You in Architecture School
By Carla Thompson, FSMPS

Architecture is an art, but it is also a business. Get the business half of the equation wrong and you probably will not get the opportunity to create much art. Architecture school develops creativity while the business and technical aspects of the industry are generally learned on the job. There are few "How to Be a Principal 101" classes, yet the curriculum can easily be summarized in three short words: go find work.

The way to become a principal is to secure enough work to sustain a team. Yet most architects never study sales and marketing, so they are unprepared when it comes to promoting their firm and their services. In fact, some architects shun 'sales' as a dirty word, preferring the term 'business development.' Call it what you like; just make learning it a priority if you want to be a principal.

Build Your Own Brand

Finding and winning work, including repeat business and referrals, involves building and maintaining client relationships. This is sales. But what you are really selling is yourself. So it is imperative that you build your personal brand and become a thought leader in your field. Proven ways of doing this include sharing your expertise and ideas through speaking opportunities, conference appearances, articles, white papers, blogs, and social media.

Become a Storyteller

Strong written communication skills are critical. Spelling, grammar, and punctuation are all essential but storytelling is an important and creative skill that helps win work. Describing a project only from a technical standpoint is like creating a building without a façade. It might stand up, but it will not command attention. The same is true with writing. Bring a project's story to life by focusing on the user experience and how the project benefited the client and the client's customers. This is the story the client wants to hear.

Look at your previous cover letters. Do they begin with, "We are pleased to submit our proposal, thank you for the opportunity," or similar bland statements? Well, so do those of most of your competitors. Set yourself apart by beginning with a compelling story that instantly engages the reader. Take a creative-writing class to sharpen your narrative skills. Your clients will notice.

Present like a Performer

Architecture students regularly participate in design critiques, yet the feedback focuses on the design and often overlooks the delivery. In the 'working' world, delivery can make the difference as you need your audience to listen to your design approach and how your solution benefits the client. This is your chance to win the work, and you will be judged on your performance.

A winning presentation articulates the client's vision and sells (that word again!) the design solution. Describe the user experience before getting into the technical details. Clients expect you to understand the technical aspects — you are an architect; it is what you do. What they really want to see is that you grasp *their* business needs. This is especially true for shortlist interviews. At this point, all the firms are similarly qualified, so it comes down to the chemistry of the project team, and a powerful performance can make the difference.

Prepare like a Pro

It is common practice for architects to spend 80 percent of their time debating the building solution, 15 percent of the time working on the graphics, and less than 5 percent of the time rehearsing the presentation. If you plan to rehearse in the car on the way to the interview - as a team once admitted to me - you might as well turn around and go back to the office. The only way to build chemistry, seamless transitions, and credibility is to practice, practice, practice.

A sure way to improve speaking skills is to join a local Toastmasters group or form one at your firm. Toastmasters (www.toastmasters.org) is a nonprofit educational organization that teaches public speaking and leadership skills through regular meetings and lots of, you guessed it, practice. Yes, it can be terrifying at first but you will improve measurably over time.

Herald Your Successes

Architects are trained to solve complex problems, so when they come up with a brilliant solution, they often feel that they are simply doing their job. When appropriate, take the opportunity to toot your own horn. Highlight novel solutions and past successes in a way that makes them relevant to the job you are trying to win. Did you save money for a client, improve their efficiency, inspire their business, encourage a break-through, save energy, improve employee retention? Use those success stories to explain how you can do the same for your prospective client. Examples speak volumes.

However, do not go overboard. Offer three *very relevant* project examples rather than 20 less relevant examples. Carefully choose examples that are similar to the project being pursued and explain in detail what was learned, and how that knowledge will be applied to the client's project highlighting how the client will benefit from the experience.

Cultivate a Network

Architects should start building a network in college and continue growing it throughout their career. This network will help you find leads, pick up referrals, and gather news. Surprisingly the majority of new project opportunities come by word of mouth.

Get out of the office and participate in client-rich organizations or associations. AIA events are valuable for professional development or job seeking, but if you want to be a principal, you need to go where the clients are. Join client-based organizations such as International Council of Shopping Center (ICSC), Urban Land Institute (ULI), Commercial Real Estate Women's Network (CREW), CoreNet Global, or NAIOP and then volunteer and get on a committee and attend events. This is how to gain access to the inner circles of the organizations and become informed about new initiatives. Every industry has a collection of organizations that serve this purpose.

Think of people that you intersect with as potential clients, whether they are consultants, vendors, builders, real estate agents, or neighbors. Once you know them, periodically ask if they know of any projects starting up.

Skill-up

The Society for Marketing Professional Services (SMPS, www.smps.org) is an excellent resource for developing and honing marketing and business development skills and networking within the building industry. There are 57 chapters around the country made up of marketing and business development professionals, firm owners, principals, and project managers from the A/E/C industry. Attend chapter meetings and programs or participate in a professional development workshop. Attend national and regional conferences to explore how other professional services firms are tackling the business challenges you and your colleagues face every day. You will return to the office with innovative solutions and fresh ideas your company can put to work immediately—and that is the type of initiative firm owners like to see from their future principals.

About the Author: Carla Thompson, FSMPS, is the Global Marketing Director for MulvannyG2 Architecture. She has been a member of the Society for Marketing Professional Services (SMPS) for over 30 years and currently serves as the Fellows Delegate on the association's Board of Directors. In honor of her contributions to the profession, she was named a Fellow in 1999, the highest level of recognition accorded to marketing professionals working within the built environment.

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Best Practices
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One of the PMKC's initiatives is to continuously improve the AIA's Best Practices. AIA Best Practices represent the collective wisdom of AIA members and related professionals. We like to highlight one or two new best practice articles in each issue of the Practice Management Digest. We encourage you to read this edition's pick:

> **BP 08.05.02 Accounts Receivable Management** Accounts receivable management (or "collections") is an extension of client relationship management. How a firm applies that reality in their practice and procedures is as varied as the individual characteristics of the firm. This Best Practice describes an approach one company successfully uses (the typical invoice is paid between 30-45 days). The approach is consistent with the personality and priorities of the firm. Click here to read the full text.

Webbinars

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Subscribe to the Practice Management play list and view archived webinars on <u>YouTube.</u> Recorded webinars are generally posted to YouTube 10 business days after the event. CE credit is available only for viewing live webinars. Dates and topics are subject to change.

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More Wisdom for the Ages: Business Development

March 28, 2013 | 1-2:15pm ET | 10-11:15am PT | Earn 1.5 AIA LUs | <u>Learn more »</u>

▸ **<u>Tell the presenter what you'd like covered »</u>**

Have you ever wanted to get advice on your toughest business development question? Well, now is your chance. Until March 10th, submit your questions (see above). Karen Compton, presenter of last year's webinar, Best Practices in Business Development, will present part 2 of our highly attended webinar by taking YOUR business development questions and concerns and offering real world advise on everything from trends to managing partners' impassioned pleas to purse everything! This session is designed to examine: trends and challenges facing business development, best practices in strategic/business development and your firm's effectiveness.

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Accounting 101 for Project Managers

May 16, 2013 | 1-2:15pm ET | 10-11:15am PT | Earn 1.5 AIA LUs | <u>Learn more »</u>

The purpose of this presentation is to provide a basic understanding of accounting principles used by the architecture and engineering industries. This is accomplished in webinar format utilizing definition or terms and examples of accounting documents and reports. In addition to Project Managers having this basic understanding, it is best that everyone in a firm understands key financial metrics and business indicators. This will provide a resource to help manage projects more successfully and connect project management with firm business management on a common platform.

This session is designed to examine: trends and challenges facing business development, best practices in strategic/business development and your firm's effectiveness.

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Project Work Planning

June 13, 2013 | 1-2:15pm ET | 10-11:15am PT | Earn 1.5 AIA LUs | <u>Learn more »</u>

The purpose of this presentation is to present the process of project work planning and the elements of a good plan. All projects, large or small should have a project work plan and certain characteristics will be common across project size and scope. The use of the appropriate level and number of tasks in a plan is discussed and this may be different between

Project Managers and project types. The approach is to simplify and produce project work plans that serve the project team, not to produce plans that must be served.

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Continue the Discussion
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In the <u>PMKC discussion forum</u>, members are being asked for a response to the proposed situation highlighted in the 2012 <u>Pro-Net scholars</u>:

CASE STUDY TOPIC

Write a 300-word-or-less description of how you would manage the following practice management situation to a favorable conclusion:

You are the Managing Principal of a 20-person architecture firm that has been hard hit by the recession. At your firm's peak it employed 35 people. Even today, as the economy is slowly recovering, your firm's profitability remains very low, barely above breakeven, due in large part to your wanting to avoid cutting even more staff while the firm still struggles to obtain enough work in a highly competitive marketplace.

Two of your firm's remaining employees are involved in marketing: a marketing manager who divides her time roughly evenly between outside-the-office networking and business development, generating leads on projects to pursue, and inside-the-office working on proposals and other marketing materials. The other marketing employee is a more junior marketing coordinator who also serves the firm in a more general administrative role.

Your in-house accountant continually points out to you and your two partners that the firm's overhead is abnormally high due in part to the number of non-billable staff, including the two marketing people (and the accountant) and recommends cutting at least one marketing position. You are conflicted about this, recognizing the financial impact on the firm yet not wanting to further erode the firm's ability to obtain work.

What conversations would you have with your two partners? How would you advocate resolving the situation?

Online Resources

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