

• Convention Report

AIA Small Project Forum

PIA

Practicing Residential Architecture: Insights from a Firm that's Made it Work!

Presented by Sarah Susanka, AIA

Session S-94; Saturday, May 8, 1999, 1:45–3:15 p.m.; 1.5 LUs

According to Sarah Susanka, architects have little information about how to service residential clients; as a profession, we have lost touch with this market. Our perception is that this segment of the marketplace is hard to serve. There is a belief among architects that it is hard to make a living designing houses because they bring in so little money and client expectations are so high. Our mindset is that people can't afford us, and our fear is that they will find reasons not to pay for architectural services.

What do residential clients want?

There are two types of potential residential clients: one wants to remodel or add-on, the other wants a new home. What are these clients looking for, and how can an architect be beneficial?

The remodeling client is often weighing whether to add-on to an

existing home, or move into a new one. To make an intelligent decision, it is vital to understand the true costs of both alternatives. At times, clients will have preconceived concepts of how to add-on. Unfortunately, these preconceived notions usually do not meet their goals. In addition, they often haven't thought about how to reuse existing spaces creatively. Initially, the client may only be looking for someone with lots of ideas, who sees their problem as interesting and would be willing to do some sketches.

A new house client is a very different type of client. They may have a difficult lot on which to build. They may be prepared with lots of pictures collected and a program written down. Or, they may be quite unprepared, and in need of guidance to define their goals from the start. In either case, they may be totally confused about what an architect does.

Most people who want to remodel, or want a new home, don't know that an architect is an option. The perception is that architects only serve very wealthy clients. We are often asked first, "how much will it cost me for you guys to draw up a set of blueprints?" Alternatively, a potential client believes their design is "done" with a sketch they drew on graph paper at home.



AIA

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The relationship between architects and builders

A potential client will usually contact a builder or a draftsman first. Some builders provide a design they've previously built. This design, which is usually "free," is used as a way to secure a project. Many builders resent an architect's intrusion into their relationships with their clients. Usually, a builder is used to a very simple set of drawings and any contractual relationship with the client is minimal. To introduce an architect into the project is seen to slow things down and complicate the process.

We need to better understand the residential builder's needs and expectations. There are different types of builders in the marketplace. Many builders are not used to highly detailed drawings and think of drawings as guidelines rather than the way things should be built. On the other hand, some builders work only with architects who provide a detailed set of drawings. We need to try to form a positive relationship with the builders, recognizing that a good builder has a lot of experience and know-how to contribute.

It is important that architects encourage clients to select a builder early in the design process. A builder involved early forces discussions about cost at a point in the design process where changes can be made relatively quickly and easily. Likewise, it should be presented to the client and builder why professional architectural services are important during construction if the house is to be built as discussed and shown in the drawings. The best two-dimensional documents cannot fully convey the aspects of a three-dimensional building without being open to interpretation. An architect's involvement is of high value in

making clarifications for the contractor as construction progresses. Without involvement in this phase, the final product can, and usually does, suffer. The architect ensures that the project is built as intended.

How do residential clients find us?

We need to change our thinking about the residential market; this is really a largely untapped market for architects. Sarah Susanka and her architecture firm believe that as more architects do residential work, there will be more opportunities for all of us. There are potential clients everywhere. We simply have to be creative about how we market to them.

The theme is familiar. We need to market our services, get the word out about what we do, and identify what the market is looking for in professional services. We need to figure out what we do well and market those skills. This will serve to promote both our profession and ourselves.

There are many ways to get out there. Join social clubs, work with neighborhood organizations, teach continuing education courses, get published, speak in public, or advertise. Call newspaper editors or reporters and tell them about a unique project on which you are working. Contributing to local newspapers and city magazines will attract local attention. Contributing to trade magazines will attract national attention. Public speaking can also attract local interest; its usefulness depends on your ability to identify with audience concerns. Lecture in front of civic groups, garden clubs, real estate people, and local builder associations. Place an ad a few times a year, send out post card mailings of a house for sale that you designed, give out reprints of articles you have written, distribute a small brochure. Susanka's office has

gotten many leads by having a booth annually at home and garden shows. You need to tell people what you love to do, so don't be too bashful. You have to toot your own horn. Be creative; potential clients are everywhere.

The client's needs and expectations

We need to have a willingness to understand what a residential client needs and expects. We need to educate clients about the variety of services available and carefully tailor these options to their specific needs. Encourage clients to read books or articles written by architects who address the design process. This way, they can understand the variety of services an architect can offer. Learning to listen to the client who is not conversant with the architectural process is very important. Clients may only want problem solving without our design skills. Or, they might not want full service and just want schematic design services. After schematic design, clients can choose to "buy" as much or as little service as they want. By offering clients a wider range of limited-service options you can reach out to a middle class clientele that may be intimidated by the costs of full services. Any contractual agreement needs to be easily understood. A client needs to understand where the tangible end points are between each phase of work to avoid ambiguity when a particular service phase is over.

The architect plays the role of trusted navigator. You must steer the project from start to finish. Recognize that most clients have hired you because they want your expertise to help guide the process as smoothly as possible. We need to understand that through the process of design we are dealing with both treasured dreams and the hard realities of dollars and

cents. They seldom coincide, and it is our job to help bring the two together. The true sign of happy clients is when they refer their friends to us.

*Ed Pressman, AIA
AIA Ohio*

It's Common Sense

An editorial

It's great to have your head screwed on right but it's even better if it stays there. Once again, SPF had a successful Convention program schedule. Steve Wintner held a sold out crowd in awe with his well-documented workshop, "Sound Business Practices to Keep Your Small Firm Profitable." Equally enlightening was Kay Lentz with her powerful "Small Firm Marketing for the Next Century." Fortunately, Kay's program was taped. I strongly recommend you get the tape and replay it every 4 months to be rejuvenated. I know I will. I found the Brochure Exchange fascinating because so little of the SPF membership was there. Actually, about 35% of those present were our members and it was a very good crowd. The food was better than ever and the graphics designers were sharp and exciting. Many thanks to Carolyn Ferguson of the Lentz Group, Houston; Nancy Usrey of Partners Usrey, Rowlett, Texas; and Ginger Williams of Dallas. Frank Welch, AIA, a member of SPF and a grand and humble gentleman, showed us a West Texas Shelter he designed that was recognized with a 25-year award by the Texas Society of Architects. I missed seeing many of the usual SPF convention goers I know. I hope those that missed out were not attending because they were so busy they couldn't break away. I felt the same way but I was obligated to attend.

I made mention at the Brochure Exchange how this program could be done on a local level. The idea was well received. If anyone does such a program, please let me know of it and how successful it was.

There was a short informal PIA Council meeting. I kind of rubbed everyone's nose into the ground with our #1 PIA status. All I said was that our success is like pizza, and is based on the fact that we deliver what our constituency wants. Was that so wrong? It did appear to offend them as they have challenged us to dare to repeat it next year. They are determined to work harder not to let Pete Wronsky have the same honor next year. Does anyone know if polish sausage is a deliverable?

At Convention, fun loving Ed Pressman of Cleveland was enlisted into the ranks of Local Advisor. In truth, he only came to meet me to see if I was what he pictured a cowboy to be. I roped him, branded him SPF, and put him to work on his birthday. Be sure to read his articles and tell him how well he did.

I feel so good I want to yell
EEEEYYAHHH!

*Hy Applebaum, AIA
1999 SPF Chair*

Director's Note

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Dinner, Wednesday, May 3, 6:00-9:00 p.m.; Brochure Exchange and Reception, Friday, May 5, 5:30-7:00 p.m.; Sole Practitioners Breakfast, Saturday May 6, 7:00-8:00 a.m. As other SPF sponsored events are determined, you will be informed in Report #18 due out April 2000. Hope to see you in William Penn's "City of Brotherly Love."

Designing Smaller, Better Designed Homes

Presented by Sarah Susanka, AIA

*Session S-11; Thursday, May 6, 1999;
2:00-3:30 p.m.; 3 LUs*

It's time for a different kind of house. A house that is more than square footage; a house that is not so big, where each room is in use every day. A house with a floor plan inspired by our informal lifestyles instead of the way our grandparents lived. A house for the future that embraces a few well-worn concepts from the past. A house that expresses our values and our personalities filled with special details and designed to accommodate the lifestyles of its occupants.

—Sarah Susanka

Many residential architects design such houses of course, but few members of the general public know or understand this. There is a significant market for residential architecture, but it remains largely untapped. Susanka tells us that architects design only 2 to 3 percent of the homes built each year. We can all participate in the revitalization of this market by serving those who want smaller, better-designed homes. And know that in the process of serving this clientele, our profession will be improving the quality, and design, of the overall housing stock in the country. This is a mission that is long overdue.

When it comes to buying or building

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When it comes to buying or building

a home, the public does not know how to ask for anything different from what it sees. Susanka says, "We are all searching for home, but we are trying to find it by building more rooms and more space." She continues, "A house is so much more than it's size and volume, neither of which has anything to do with comfort."

It is important to talk to clients about how they will use their spaces, what they value, and what their real lifestyles are like. Many people do not use formal living rooms and very infrequently use formal dining rooms. Today, when friends come over for entertaining it is usually very informal. By opening up spaces visually, and by interconnecting and combining kitchen, dining, and living space, square footage can be reduced while creating a very spacious feeling. The idea is to get a house that feels more like a home.

There is little language about the quality of a house, the quality of spaces, and the quality of details. Sarah Susanka's book, *The Not So Big House*, talks about these attributes. She recounts story after story where, despite a home's fulfillment of all the traditional "must have's," people are feeling out of place in their houses. Often, they spend the majority of their time in one area of their home. Susanka says, "Over the last couple of years, more and more people who have lived in impersonal, oversized homes have come to our office and asked, "Is there an alternative?"

The answer, of course, is yes, and is explained in great detail as Susanka's book examines ways that large areas fall short of providing livable space. An entire chapter dedicated to rethinking homes includes thoughtful analysis of how home life has evolved and how home design needs

to evolve to match it. She discusses ways to evaluate home and lifestyle needs, and provides guidelines on how to proceed with the design of a not-so-big house. She presents detailed design ideas on how ceiling height and window placement increase the perception of space in smaller rooms. Wish lists vs. reality lists are used to understand what is possible within given budget and space constraints. Sustainable building techniques furthers the not-so-big ideal of reducing waste, whether it is in the size of a home or in the selection of construction techniques and materials.

Susanka's intentions in writing her book and speaking around the country are to inspire the consumer marketplace, and to open the eyes of architects, builders, realtors, appraisers, and mortgage brokers who place value on the traditional home model. She says, "The people who define the monetary value of our homes need to bring their valuation system to where it's better suited to how we're really living."

She has convinced this architect.

*Ed Pressman, AIA
AIA Ohio*

A Treat in the Big "D"

Wednesday, May 5, 1999; 6:00-9:00 p.m.; SPF Signature Event for Local Advisors

You began your travel to a city beyond, toting luggage in anticipation of a rewarding trip. Awaiting your arrival was your seat for dinner at FISH, a seafood restaurant in the heart of Dallas. Jerry Morgan, AIA, Small Project Forum Advisory Group Advisor, displayed his talents via orchestration of a wonderfully prepared dinner for local advisors attending the convention.

The restaurant on the corner appeared average upon arrival at the curb. Once you stepped inside, your discretionary senses were soothed by the crisp appearance of the space; the attention to detail at the table, fresh with flowers; and your peers chatting with excitement about the events to come! A cool beverage in hand offered the chance to relax and absorb the surroundings while gravitating into the conversation at hand.

The specially selected menu, poised on the tablecloth, presented main course land and sea options with varieties of regional flare, local and international. The prelude of salads was served promptly, fresh in appearance and flavor, with a spin on every standard. Each entrée was delivered individually, as though each a solo. The chorus of desserts ranged from chocolate to bread pudding, with a sampling offer from every guest at the table. Throughout the meal, the knowledge and observations of those present made for a delightful, architecturally centered evening.

Following the meal, we selected the seminars we would attend (summaries of which follow). Upon your review, perhaps you will share a sense of the harmony of energy and enthusiasm for the profession that such an event provides. Plan to join us in Philadelphia at the beginning of May 2000. Finally, an ovation to so many who worked so hard to make this eventful!

Value Pricing Design Services

Presented by Frank Stasiowski, FAIA

Session W-13; Wednesday, May 5, 1999; 1:00-5:00 p.m.; 7.5 LUs

Architects in small firms often struggle with cash flow due to the low overall

fee that each small project brings in. The following points will help you price for value and profits.

Sell intellectual power, not drafting power

Traditional A/E practice is changing; profits from consulting services are far exceeding profits from the production of construction documents.

Consulting services can be regarded as the definition of problems and the creation of solutions. Small architecture firms may be well positioned to offer consulting services like site investigation, quality design, permitting, and other related services. Firms that are perceived as providing great service and the highest level of accommodation to clients can charge the highest prices because they provide the greatest value.

Use lump sum, value-based contracting

Use value-based contracts instead of time-based contracts. When using an hourly billing structure, you wind up charging less for your services as you become more efficient in your design and drawing delivery.

Due to the use of technology, small architecture firms have become more efficient at delivering architectural services. When you invest in technology, you become more efficient; but if you still bill hourly, you are losing money. You are simply billing less for the same services.

Other professions handle the pricing of services differently and therefore do not share our money woes. If you seek the services of an attorney to draft a will, you will most likely be charged a lump sum for this service (say \$1,000+). This attorney is billing you for the value of the service, not the hours it took to prepare the will. It takes an

attorney about an hour for this service (to plug-in your name and pertinent data on the word processor). Yet we never think of it as an hourly rate of \$1,000/hr. Why not? Because the attorney did not bill us an hourly rate. Instead, he charged a lump sum that equaled the perceived value of the service. Architects can (try to) do the same.

Raise your fees now

Do you feel you are not paid enough? If you answer yes to this question, then this is the time to boost your fees. The reason: the economy is on the upswing. If you truly believe that you are underpaid, are you going to wait until the recession hits before you reevaluate the value of the services you are offering?

Never turn down a job

If you do not want a job, over-price it. Then ask the potential client to keep you in mind if the architect they choose does not work out.

Price on value, manage on cost

Architects cannot make money by selling time (i.e. billing hourly). Therefore:

- Charge for the value of the service not the cost of it. Never quote an hourly rate (except when required for government contracts). Instead, evaluate the service you are offering and submit a value-priced lump sum.
- Instead of applying a percentage mark-up for reimbursables, prepare a price list for the reimbursables, and attach it to your contract.
- Stay competitive without cutting your fee. Get out of offering services everyone else is providing, especially when you are losing

money on them. Instead, invest in equipment and training for greater efficiency, and offer services in which you have a clear advantage.

- Quote your price in pieces relative to the scope of the project. Then present them as a menu of items that can be added to, or subtracted from, the services.

Tips for getting paid.

- Ask for a retainer up front and apply credit to the **final invoice only**.
- Apply a restart fee if the project stops for more than "x" weeks.
- List reimbursables as an appendix to the contract/agreement based on a fixed unit-cost price (not a multiplier of cost).
- State that "permit drawings will not be stamped until all invoices to date are paid." State on progress drawings that "Set is not for use for permitting unless stamped by architect."

Good luck on your next contract negotiation.

*Charles Matta, AIA
AIA Northern Virginia*

Architecture as a Performance Art: Sharpening your Presentation Skills or How to Get Your Point Across

*Presented by David Gruesel, AIA,
HOK Sport, Kansas City*

*Session S-63; Friday, May 7, 1999,
2:00-3:30 p.m.; 3 LUs*

First things first: Swipe your ID card for electronic continuing ed. units.

Second: Make a cursory review of the handouts (available to you at the AIA Web site).

Third: Pick a seat with a little extra leg room behind a short guy.

Without paying close attention to the title of this seminar, I went assuming the focus was graphic presentations (based on the term “sharpening” in the title). So much for key words! As I reviewed the handouts, it occurred to me—alas—this was paralleled to the stage, not the easel.

David Gruesel, the presenter, spends time on the stage when he is not working for HOK, and this is obvious from the comfort and control he maintains with his audience. And that is the key: maintain control of your audience.

This seminar enacted the skills needed to lead a successful presentation, with David in the spotlight demonstrating each point during his own presentation! As a small project architect, you may not find yourself presenting to an audience of many, but this presentation will challenge you to take control of any presentation, and may inspire you to step up your presentation to a different style and level.

Ask yourself, “What do I fear most about presenting to an audience?”

Write down your answers. The seminar audience was polled and answered:

- **Negative responses from your audience indirectly related to your project.** Example: You are presenting an addition to a schoolhouse. The lady on the fifth row stands up and says, “If the school board had elected to reopen the school in the adjacent neighborhood, we wouldn’t have to spend more tax money to build this addition.”

- **Losing the attention of your audience.**
- **The tools for your presentation malfunction.**

David wrote these answers on a PowerPoint screen for the audience to view. (By now you should be mentally prepared for the context of this presentation.)

When developing your presentation, keep in mind the message you want your audience to receive. The message that your audience actually receives defines how successful you are in getting your point across. To improve the delivery of this message, follow the

Ten Commandments of Show Business

1. Show Up

- This means be in the present, on time, and in focus. Leave your issues at the door.
- Dress the part, stand up straight, and maintain body movement.

2. What’s My Motivation

- What is the “Big Idea”?
- Set up a story line with a conflict and a resolution. (You get to be the one who resolves the conflict!)
- Select your presentation format. Be interactive.
- Appear off the cuff, but well prepared.
- Don’t tell the audience what they need, ask them.
- Repeat client interactive responses. (This allows the client to set the agenda although you have asked the questions to engage an expected answer.)
- Bait the audience like a news anchor.

3. Know Your Lines

- Be sincere.
- Research your topic.
- Over prepare but don’t over deliver.
- Practice speaking, but not the speech.
- Watch news anchors deliver even ho-hum info!

4. Find Your Light

- Check out the room early.
- Things will go wrong. Have a back-up plan.

5. Face Out

- Do not talk to your boards or the screen.
- Speak quickly.
- Change your voice frequency.
- Use an anecdote from your own experience to find a common element between your audience and yourself.
- Do not make fun of a situation.
- Be enthusiastic and entertaining.

6. Keep Going

- Poise comes from experience—both good and bad.
- Learn to overcome stage fright!
- The Five Minute Principle: stage fright lasts 5 minutes. Take a break after 2 minutes.

7. Project

- Talk to the furthest person in the audience, but talk; don’t yell.

8. Be in the Moment

- Leave your concerns at the door. This prevents stale delivery and improves audience reactions.
- Do not anticipate what you will say or what you have said.

9. Remember Your Props

- Use overheads, transparencies, or PowerPoint. Always bring back-ups.
- Use technology appropriate to your audience. For sophisticated audiences, use hand drawn graphics. Less sophisticated audiences are wooed by the high tech stuff.

10. Know When to Get Off

- Don't over present.
- Leave your audience wanting more interaction with you.

When you decide to present your project ideas, remember the presentation itself is as important as the ideas it delivers. Deliver the correct message and relax; you are the professional and the audience wants you to be!

*Laura Lee Russell, AIA
AIA Oklahoma City*

Making Sense Out of Pricing Architectural Services

*Presented by Kermit Baker PhD, AIA,
Economics and Market Research,
Washington, DC*

*William F. Fanning, PSMJ, Inc.,
Marietta, GA*

*Moderated by Ronald Brame, HKS
Architects, Dallas*

*Session S-109; Saturday, May 8, 1999;
3:30-5:00 p.m.; 3 LUs*

Estimating the time it takes to do a job is equally difficult for both large and small firms.

Negotiated fees often fail to accurately reflect work expended.

Proportion of times that negotiated fees accurately reflect work expended:

	Small Firms (under 5)	Large (20 or more)
Almost always	10%	11%
Mostly	53%	42%
Half of the time	20%	39%
Occasionally	10%	4%
Almost never	7%	4%

- Design fees often don't match required work.

Proportion of times that design fees actually match required work:

Almost always	10%
Mostly	47%
Half of the time	27%
Occasionally	11%
Almost never	5%

- Factors affecting fees:

- 1 Type of project / type of client
- 2 Scale of project
- 3 Risk assumed by design firm
- 4 Level of detail in estimating project
- 5 Scope of services provided

- The typical fee for design services averages 7 percent.
- Smaller projects generate higher percentage fees.
- Single family residential fees average 6.7 percent.
- Fixed fee contracts do not reflect the greater-risk taken by the design firm and do not get additional compensation.
- A more detailed estimation system would generate more accurate fees.
- Additional services usually generate higher fees.
- What are fair profits?

The fair profit level in other industries is well above that of the design professional:

Local Telephone service average	20%
High Tech firms average	30%
Manufacturers	10% to 15%
Architects	5% to 12%

*Hy Applebaum, AIA
AIA Houston*

Small Firm Marketing for the Next Century

Presented by Kay Lentz, The Lentz Group, Houston

*Session S-118; Sunday, May 9, 1999,
8:30-10:30 a.m.; 4 LUs*

This was probably the best seminar I attended at this Convention. Approximately 60 architects chose to remain on Sunday for the event and I know they felt it was worth it. I personally recommend that everyone get a copy of the tape and play it about every 4 months to know it by heart. Ms. Lentz covered the entire gamut of promoting and marketing as appropriate to an architect.

Rules of effective marketing

1. Develop clients instead of chasing projects

By the time you hear of a project to chase, that project is also known to others and possibly spoken for. Instead, decide on the kind of projects you want to do and develop a plan to meet the people in that industry. Your ability to make friends and gain the prospective client's confidence should ultimately land the first project. After that it should be easier.

2. Eating your way to a job

Invite prospective clients to a lunch or dinner to get them in a better frame of mind. But remember, you don't want to talk to them when they are in the grasp of an office dilemma. A better

option could be to ask them to join you for breakfast while they are fresh and before they get to the office mayhem.

3. Gently apply a personal touch

It isn't out of line to give innocent gifts or momentos of an event, or recommend things or businesses they need. Get them to rely on you and your judgements. Serve on the board of your civic association, church, charity, or PTA.

4. Share in their causes

Donate to their favorite charity when asked. If they are involved in a charity event, buy tickets from them to express your interest. If you can not go, give your tickets to another prospective client or networker who might feel obligated to help you. No matter what you do for the charity, make sure the prospective client knows about it.

5. Have fun

Think of novel ways to promote and entertain outside the realm of business or office. Take the prospective client to the ball game, or golfing, or an art fair. Every Halloween, The Lentz Group sponsors a pumpkin-carving contest for their clients. The winning pumpkins are auctioned with the proceeds going to a charity. The remaining pumpkins are sold for \$50 each. The charity wins and everyone has a good time.

6. Make your client a star

You don't necessarily need to let your client win every game, but it does help. Plan events around their interests. If you see an article in the paper about them or their industry, or even their charities, mail it to them with a kind note of congratulations or whatever fits.

7. Talk about them not you

Show an interest in their lives, children, hobbies, ambitions, and yes, even their jobs. Don't get drawn into a conversation about your design-work or talents. Architects tend to be long winded about themselves.

8. Just ask

If you know of an upcoming project from a prospective client, ask for an interview or do a presentation so you can be considered. Many times, they have no knowledge that you do that particular type of work. Also, don't be shy about asking someone for leads and introductions. The worst that can happen is for the individual to be unable to assist you.

9. Networking is life

The more people you are in contact with, the greater your chances to land a job. There are many networking clubs you could join and they are generally loyal to each other.

10. Remember the client all year

Try starting a database for each individual with birth dates, anniversaries, and other pertinent information. Send birthday, anniversary, get well, Christmas, and other holiday cards and send them on time.

Marketing Budgets

A percentage of your profit should be earmarked for marketing. Larger firms can devote a greater amount, usually 15 percent. For a small firm 2 percent to 5 percent would be realistic. To accurately portray the real cost, don't forget to include your time.

The remainder of this seminar is difficult to meaningfully report. It covers proposals and presentations, as well as public relations. There is beneficial information, but the tape

will explain it better. Again, I recommend you get the tape as a primer and play it as often as necessary. For ordering information, please see the July issue of *AIArchitect*.

*Hy Applebaum, AIA
AIA Houston*

Negotiating Strategies: 12 Steps to Improving Profitability

Presented by Michael Strogoff, AIA

*Session S-23; Thursday, May 6, 1999;
3:45-5:15 p.m.; 3 LUs*

Michael Strogoff is an architect who specializes in helping architects negotiate better fees and agreements with their clients. The former co-owner and managing partner of a large architectural and planning firm, he has negotiated several hundred agreements for architects with public and private entities. In opening, Mr. Strogoff stated that many clients are surprised at how low a fee most architects will accept. He feels that we generally act as if time is limitless—this attitude results in lower productivity and profitability. Negotiation is voluntary and should help us achieve our goals. Unlike the process of buying an automobile, we are establishing a long-term relationship. We should have a strategy based on priorities and concerns. The following are Mr. Strogoff's 12 steps toward improving contracts and profitability.

STEP 1: Know the client

Ask open-ended questions about the project in order to get clients to state their objectives. What problems did they have with their last architect? What kind of agreement do they want? How will they evaluate fees? Establishing this dialogue is best done

face-to-face. Try to avoid negotiation by mail.

STEP 2: Agree on priorities

Identify and establish access to decision-makers. What is needed for the project to be successful? Determine what might go wrong and who is in a position to help fix it.

STEP 3: Communicate directly with the client

Don't negotiate agreements through the construction manager. Get a list of concerns directly from the stakeholders. They generally expect more from their negotiator than is realistic.

STEP 4: Don't negotiate with yourself

Most architects tend to ask themselves "Am I worth that much?" "What if my price is too high?" "What if I don't get the job because someone else will do it for less?" Remember that profits let you attract and pay top staff, weather business cycles, reward the principals, and stay in business. Beware of "loss leaders." They reinforce in clients a false sense of reality. Fees which are below the market generally lead to disappointment for both parties. If you feel that you must discount your fee to get a particular project, emphasize that you are doing so to demonstrate your ability. (*Editor's note: would you hire a surgeon who offered to remove your gallbladder for \$149.98 because he wanted to demonstrate that he could do it?*)

STEP 5: Send your best negotiators

Your negotiating team should be trustworthy and trusting, confident, composed and detached, persuasive and fast thinking, possess a sense of perspective about what's important, and understand people. The goal during

negotiations is not to be popular. Don't take negotiations personally. People will often demand more for less, and act out if they don't get it because these tactics have served them well at some point in their lives.

STEP 6: Practice effective persuasion

Talk about the benefits, linking tasks to objectives. Give something for the brain—such as how much energy will be saved by particular building systems, and something for the heart—stress that design meetings will be held to reach consensus and to alleviate anxiety. It is often helpful to bring a set of contract documents to illustrate your points.

STEP 7: Level the playing field

You should know what other architects charge for similar projects. Know how your firm's approach differs from theirs, and be able to point out the ways in which your firm is best suited to deliver the services needed. Include allowances for some optional services. Break down your proposed fee into bite-sized pieces. State your assumptions (e.g. a single bid package from the general contractor). If another firm has offered to do the work for an appreciably lower fee, you can offer to work with the client to approach them.

STEP 8: Select a mutually beneficial compensation method

There is a myriad of ways to calculate the fee for architectural services. Determine the one that is most beneficial to both the client and yourself. A fee based on a percentage of the construction cost penalizes the architects if they succeeds in saving the client money. If the scope of the project is known, the architect should be able to determine a fixed fee for basic services—try to convert a per-

centage of a realistic budget to a lump sum.

STEP 9: Assign a dollar value to the terms

If you are willing to expand or reduce the scope of your services, be able to identify the financial implications. Don't try to negotiate fees for additional services after the project has been funded.

STEP 10: "...and the wisdom to know the difference"

If you do not have control over certain aspects of the project, don't accept responsibility for them. Code changes and interpretations thereof, remedying defective construction, review of out of sequence submittals, and multiple punch lists are examples of conditions which will require additional (and otherwise uncompensated) time. Include allowances for all the services that might be required.

Step 11: Overcome temporary obstacles

Articulate the reasons why you are reluctant to assume some requested responsibilities without additional compensation. Offer incentives that don't cost you a great deal, but make your concessions conditional and linked to the greater issue. Circle back if you reach an impasse; always leave the door open for future resolution.

STEP 12: Sell wide, sell deep

Work with your staff to review your proposal material. Discuss your range of expertise and brainstorm about what you can supply that the client is not expecting.

*Edward Z. Wronsky Jr., AIA
AIA Long Island East End Section*

Project Close-Out Continues: It's Hard to Say We're Through

*Presented by Dean Illingsworth, FAIA,
Schmidt Associates, Indianapolis*

*Connie McFarland, FAIA, McFarland
Architects, PC*

*Richard Tilghman, Pepper
Construction Co., Chicago*

*Session S-48; Friday, May 7, 1999;
8:00–9:30 a.m.; 3 LUs*

This session concentrated on the problems with completing the construction process. From the contractor, we heard complaints of unrealistic periods and closing processes started too late. From the architects, we heard of superintendents submitting punch lists before the building was ready, creating second and third trips for the architect, difficulty in getting warranty items corrected or difficulty having subs come to correct things in a timely manner.

All parties agreed to several procedures

- Select the construction superintendent very carefully.
- Make a design presentation to the general contractor (GC) superintendent and essential subs to outline your expectations.
- Get qualified subs.
- Push for prompt decisions with no need for fire drills.
- Be sure the users (especially if they are tenants) understand the project and have reviewed the documents.
- Make thorough investigations.
- Refrain from ambiguous notes such as "VIF" or "match existing."

- Draw buildable details.
- Coordinate and check the documents before construction.
- Prompt payments create a team effort.
- Regularly walk the job with the superintendent.
- Specify that the final six weeks shall be utilized as the Closing Out. Design a plan of action for this period.
- Specify amount of retainage that will be held during Closing Out.
- Have the GC submit operations and maintenance manuals at 50 percent complete.
- Schedule a Close Out conference with involved construction personnel and spell out their Close Out requirements.
- Have a non biased superintendent of the GC write the punch list.
- Assign a staff to lead Close Out; lead discussions weekly for the final six-week period.
- Schedule final submissions of operations training and manuals; maintenance manuals; and as-built-drawings, warranties, and bonds.
- Let the contractor submit his Punch List to the architect.
- Specify that after the 2nd trip to clear the Punch List, additional trips shall be at GC's expense.
- Transfer insurance to the owner.
- Specify an eleven-month post-construction revue with owner and GC.
- Enable the GC to do a good job.

*Hy Applebaum, AIA
AIA Houston*

Quality Control and Coordination with Computer-Aided Practice and Electronic Documents

Presented by Tony Dinicoola

*Session S-60; Friday, May 7, 1999;
1:45–3:15 p.m.; 3 LUs*

Though this session had some reasonable information, it became a boring tit-for-tat brawl between the speaker and the chair of the Computer-Aided Practice PIA. The speaker, while professing to follow the AIA layer standards with modifications, was recommending his *own* system for the very same reasons the standard was created. Because of the disruption, I'll tell what I learned that is non-controversial.

- Keep a layer system simple and understandable for your staff and all the engineers who will work on your project. Remember your engineers are also working for other architects who may want to develop their own system. Use menu and script files to standardize your system.
- Design a prototype or template drawing complete with Layers, Dimension Styles, Text Styles, Limits, Menu, Units, or any other standard variables.
- Develop a system that will transfer easily from architectural, to structural, to mechanical, etc.
- Use the *AIA Guidelines for Layering* as a starting point and modify to suit your practice.
- Do not overdo the number of layers, and don't use layers that are named after colors or are numbered.

- Do not use hidden, center, or phantom line types or line widths.
- Do not use "_" or "-" in naming layers since they take up memory.
- Do not use "Layer 0."
- Drop vowels in the layer names.
- Your drawing should be one step more accurate than the accuracy with which you want your project built. To build at 1/8" accuracy, draw to 1/16" accuracy.
- Do not use snap, it will interfere with the drawing accuracy.
- Use previous drawings to generate new drawings. To create the elevations and sections, insert the Floor Plan as a BLOCK or XREF into the drawings.
- Plot using PAPER SPACE and plot 1:1 using your title block to set up the sheet.
- Drawing notes should be placed in PAPER SPACE.
- Plot with view ports zoom 1/dimscale xp.
- Section cuts should be in paper space.
- You should never have to draw anything twice and then check for redundancy or contradictions. By limiting yourself to drawing something once, you can eliminate mismatched details and notes.

Default Scale Factors for Architectural Drawings

Desired Scale	Dimscale	Ltscale	Text Height
1/16"	192	96	16"
1/8"	96	48	8"
"	48	24	4"
"	24	12	2"
"	16	8	1"
1"	12	6	1"
1 1/2"	8	4	"
3"	6	3	"
Half Size	2	1	"
Full size	1	-	"

Dimscale: scale x 12 or 16 x 12 =

192 for 16th scale drawing

Ltscale: = Dimscale x.5

Plot Insertion Scale: = 1/Dimscale

Plot Scale: = 1/DimscaleXP

The most disappointing aspect of this session was the speaker telling the audience he was still using AutoCad Release 13, a system I feel should never have been marketed.

*Hy Applebaum, AIA
AIA Houston*

What it Costs to Run an Office

Sound Business Practices to Keep Your Small Firm Profitable

*Presented by Steve Wintner, AIA,
Management Consulting Services,
Woodlands, Tex.*

*Session W-04; Wednesday, May 5,
1999; 8:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m.; 7.5 LUs*

Checking Your Firm's Vital Signs

*Presented by Charles R. Holcomb Jr.,
Assoc. AIA, The Picus Group,
Roanoke, Va.*

*Session W-15; Wednesday, May 5,
1999; 1:00-5:00 p.m.; 7.5 LUs*

My report on these two sessions is combined due the great amount of overlap in the information I garnered. Wintner's presentation was loaded with forms, formulas, and basic common sense strategies required to get a handle on what it costs to run an office. He used this information to determine how to attain maximum profits. Mr. Wintner made a strong point about value-based compensation, which means delivering and charging for services that will provide profitability for you and satisfaction to the client, as opposed to cost-based compensation, which limits profitability.

Satisfaction of service

equals

A client's perception

less

A client's expectation

You are expected to provide technical service. The service that is not expected of you is non-technical in nature and involves listening, performing, and educating. When they are provided, these non-technical items are an added value the client perceives but does not expect. Satisfaction for a service is experienced when the perception is greater than the expectation. What I still don't understand is how the clients know that they are getting a value above a technical nature and agree to pay a value-based fee before experiencing the satisfaction of the service.

The handout was loaded with diagrams, spreadsheets, and formulas which are impossible to include in this article. However, I will give some input and guidelines that were presented. There was discussion on:

- Formulating a billing rate

- Project budgeting

- Preparing an annual budget

- Key financial indicators/balance sheet analysis

1. Utilization Rate

(measure of staff productivity)

Formula: **Direct Labor**

(project hrs)/**Total Labor Hrs.**

Target: 60% to 65% overall, and 75% to 85% for technical staff. (incl. principals).

2. Overhead Rate

Formula: **Total Indirect**

Expenses (\$)/Direct Labor (\$)
x 100.

Target: from 1.50 to 1.75 x Salary.

3. Break-Even Rate (cost of operations per dollar of labor)

Formula: **Overhead Rate x Hrly Salary + Hrly Salary**

Target: from 2.5 to 2.75 x Salary.

4. Net Multiplier (measure of revenue as a percent of direct labor)

Formula: **Net Operating Revenue/Direct Labor**

Target: from 2.75 to 3.25 or better.

5. Aged Accounts Receivable

Target: not to let collection drag past 60–90 days after invoice date.

6. Profit to Earnings Ratio

Formula: **Profit** (before distribution & taxes)/**Net Operating Revenue**

7. Net Revenue per Employee

Formula: **Annual Net Operating Revenue/Number of Employees**

Target: \$65,000–\$75,000 per employee for total staff.

8. Cash Flow

Formula: **none**

Target: maintain a cash balance that will pay all salaries, expenses, and leave a little left for money on hand.

9. Proposals Pending

Formula: **none**

Target: have Prospects equal or higher than Net Operating Revenue. Have Suspects equal to 1.5 to 2.0 of Net Operating Revenue.

10. Backlog Volume

Formula: **none**

Target: maintain at equal dollar amount to budgeted Net Operating Revenue.

Mr. Holcomb used slightly different numbers for these indicators.

- Financial Indicators

1. Net Revenue: average \$80,000 per staff person.

2. Utilization: 62%–64% of fees for Direct Labor.

3. Effective Multiplier: 3x Hourly Salary (average).

4. Overhead Factor: assume A = Direct Labor; B = Overhead at 1.5 to 1.75 x hourly rate and Profit at 20% of A+B, then the Effective Multiplier = 3.12.

5. Age of Accounts receivable average is 90 days.

6. Backlog: You need to evaluate your comfort level.

7. Operating Profit (before distribution and taxes). Relates to money left over to operate. No recommendation.

Other issues raised by Mr. Holcomb included:

- Management traps

1. Not measuring the firm's financial performance. Keep good books to reference and check against all seven factors above.

2. Budgeting the hours for each project.

- The rest of the story

1. Strategic positioning

a. Are you prepared for hard times?

b. Are there alternate services you perform?

c. Are you delving into new market segments or other geographic areas?

d. Are there alliances or client partnering opportunities to explore?

2. Business development

a. What is your position in your sales efforts?

b. Do you check why you didn't get the last project for which you made a proposal?

c. How much can you afford to spend on promotion?

d. Are you setting any kind of trend?

3. Project delivery

a. Do you have the infrastructure in place to deliver projects?

b. Do you have the latest technology and the skills to use it?

c. Do you have a Project Management Program?

d. What has been your trend in project management?

4. Human Resources

a. Do you attract good people and do you maintain them?

b. Do you have a periodic performance appraisal review?

- c. Are you on an incentive compensation program?
 - d. How is your staff morale?
5. Leadership/ownership transition
- a. Will the firm be in existence tomorrow?
 - b. Who will be trained to lead it?
 - c. Who will own it?

As you can see, this was a full day's effort to undergo and the Convention had not even started. If anyone has any questions regarding these two sessions, feel free to call (713) 981-7315 or email RA.ARCH@CWIXMAIL.COM

Hy Applebaum, AIA
AIA Houston

If you would like to report on issues relevant to the Small Project Forum from your area on a regular basis, we invite you to join our network of Local Advisors. Please call Laura Lee Russell, AIA.

The opinions expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect those of the Advisory Group, the AIA staff members who prepared the report, or The American Institute of Architects.

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