AIA Practice Management Digest – May 2019

The only thing that is constant is change

Letter from the editor

By Sara R. Boyer, AIA, LEED AP BD+C

Whether you embrace change, run from it, or oscillate between those two ends of the spectrum, what remains true is Change. Is. Constant.

This quarter's issue focuses on change… BIG change. I am particularly grateful to the contributors to this issue and their forthrightness on these big, and at times intimate, topics. Learn how to plan for big change in "Strategic planning: Using vision, values, and mission as a firm foundation." This article provides the framework to solidify the foundation for your firm and its desired future. The AIA Trust provides an easy-to-follow article "Leadership succession is the future" with several references for continued reading. Read about a recent and first-hand the experience of firm transition with an eye towards retirement in "Convergence: Leadership and ownership transition through the merger acquisition experience." Follow along with one firm's business and cultural journey to strategically expand with its first satellite office in "Preparing to launch: Keys to success in a new geographic market".

If your firm is about to implement BIG change, check out the additional resources below and referenced within the article concerning leadership succession.

I hope you enjoy this quarter's edition of *Practice Management Digest* focusing on BIG change, and please consider the environment before you print.

Features

Features

Leadership succession is the future
Contributed by The AIA Trust

Leadership succession is the future. Fostering staff development, identifying and grooming future firm leaders requires long-term planning to achieve successful continuation of a firm based on a productive, thriving, and successful staff. Succession planning has long been a measure of good management – and it involves an investment of both time and money.

Convergence: Leadership and ownership transition through the merger acquisition experience

By Betsey Olenick Dougherty, FAIA, LEED AP

All firms have or will face the quandary of evaluating the best option for transition with retirement looming for its founding partners. Design prowess, business administration, and firm culture are all factors particular to each entity and their journey towards transition. Here's the play-by-play process that one firm went through.

Strategic planning: Using vision, values, and mission as a firm foundation
By Karen O. Courtney, AIA, FSMPS, MBA

Just like a building has a strong foundation, an architecture firm should have a strategic plan upon which to build its desired future. The critical foundational elements of vision, values, and mission are described and used to set the goals, strategies and tactics needed for success.

Preparing to launch: Keys to success in a new geographic market
By Jonathan Lusin, AIA, LEED AP

Jonathan Lusin, Principal at IKM Architecture, shares his lessons learned as his firm embarks on growing the firm’s first satellite office, launched earlier this year.

Further reading and resources

The New Competitiveness in Design & Construction by Joe M. Powell

Art's Principles: 50 Years of Hard-Learned Lessons by Arthur Gensler & Michael Lindenmayer

The AIA Foresight Report

Contribute to the Digest

The future issues of the *Practice Management Digest* are currently planned to cover topics such as firm management, talent management, and architectural writing. If you have topics related to practice management that you'd like explored or articles you would like us to consider, please contact Sara Boyer, AIA, at sboyer@moodynolan.com.

Practice Management

network.aia.org/blogs/sara-r-boyer-aia/2019/05/30/leadership-succession-is-the-future

Leadership Succession Is the Future

Contributed by The AIA Trust

Leadership succession IS the future. Recruiting employees who have the potential to take the firm into the next generation is imperative. Fostering staff development, identifying and grooming future firm leaders requires long-term planning to achieve successful continuation of a firm based on a productive, thriving, and successful staff. Succession planning has long been a measure of good management – and it involves an investment of both time and money.

Ed Hord, FAIA, founder and senior principal of Hord, Coplan, Macht in Baltimore, emphasized in his article, Architecture Firm Ownership Transitions, that running a firm that is successful and profitable is not enough. If one wants to create real value in a firm that could in later years fund a founder's retirement, then great attention needs to be paid to the development and retention of the next generation of leaders. And once a firm invests time and money in mentoring and training ambitious, intelligent young professionals, one must ensure that they are well compensated – including firm ownership – to share in the financial success of the firm as an incentive to continue building value in their current firm.

As summarized in the article, Principal Interest by Scott Simpson, FAIA, LEED AP, becoming a firm principal requires new responsibilities that one may not yet have acquired the knowledge to perform. It also means taking on risk, financial and professional, when firm ownership is considered, with an opportunity to share in the profits and the losses. Incoming leaders need to embrace an entrepreneurial motivation and an understanding of and tolerance for associated risks.

He adds that not everyone is cut out for becoming a firm principal, which is fine – but for those who are ready to take it on, becoming a principal can be enormously rewarding. However, it will change almost everything – from work relationships to work responsibilities to workload. But becoming a principal will open new doors to leadership and influence, including in shaping the future of the firm's projects, their staffing and production. Simpson advises one to assess the potential objectively since becoming a principal is essentially a business transaction. Since most architects are not trained in business management, there will be an ongoing and steep learning curve and associated risks.

Simpson also advises before taking the plunge that one consult a lawyer to fully understand

Simpson also advises before taking the plunge that one consult a lawyer to fully understand the structure of your deal and your ultimate exposure. This should also include researching firm prospects, legal issues, staff qualifications and stability, etc. – all of which may affect future success, determining how you will be able to meaningfully advance the mission of the firm.

The Cameron MacAllister Group, an A/E/C business consulting firm, conducted a benchmark study in 2017 about how architecture firms from all over the country with a “high quality design orientation” handle the ownership succession process for one or more founders nearing the end of their tenure. From their study and their consulting engagements, they identified six important steps in successful internal ownership transfer summarized in an article Advice to Potential New Principals, by Mark A. Cameron, Hon. AIA.

Both Simpson and Cameron underscore the importance of understanding one’s financial commitment. Simpson suggests careful review of the firm’s past financial statements and relevant partnership agreements with special attention to liability issues and executive decision-making. Cameron notes that one can expect to bring one’s own money to the initial purchase – which may require a loan or equity line of credit on one’s mortgage. He adds that one can expect to forego bonuses for a few years but that the long view is important and while it may take several years to become fully vested financially, there will be future financial rewards of being an owner.

It is also critical to understand that as a new firm principal, relationships will change. They note that as a “rookie”, it could take up to several years to prove yourself and become involved in executive decision-making. Managing risk effectively comes from business experience as well as aptitude. Proving oneself means working to develop trust with new experience as well as aptitude. Proving oneself means working to develop trust with new partners as well as staff. Cameron points out that since you won't be able to choose your partners, you will need to make a concerted effort to establish trust and rapport with them.

Being sensitive to the firm culture, laying the groundwork for upcoming changes, and communicating in a transparent manner all contribute toward smoothing firm transition. Incoming firm principals need to work on developing clear and authentic communication skills to handle difficult decisions and avoid misunderstandings. As Cameron notes, "becoming a principal is the beginning of a new chapter…moving from the top rung of the staff ladder to the bottom rung of the principal ladder…will take time, work, and patience to become truly effective at leading others."

Cameron notes that developing a broader skill set and taking on additional responsibilities are also key. Skills development needs to include handling staffing and operational details, managing financial aspects of running a firm, winning new work, and handling clients effectively. Taking university-level business classes may be in order, as well as AIA continuing education courses. A sincere commitment to work harder than ever to attract new business, learning as much as possible about effectively marketing the firm, and serving as a firm ambassador throughout the community are all paramount to future success.

Being an owner-principal in an architecture firm "is a sought-after goal of many architectural practitioners," Cameron concludes. With hard work, Simpson states that eventually you will "be in a position to select the next generation of principals to lead your firm, and if you have done a good job, they will be better and smarter than you are. The ultimate measure of success is to leave the place in better shape than you found it."

For more resources on this topic, see the AIA Trust webpage of Ownership Transition Resources by clicking here.

Letter from the Editor + Resources >

Convergence: Leadership and ownership transition through the merger acquisition experience

By Betsey Olenick Dougherty, FAIA, LEED AP

All firms have or will face the quandary of evaluating the best option for transition with retirement looming for its founding partners. Design prowess, business administration, and firm culture are all factors particular to each entity and their journey towards transition. This article explains the play-by-play process for one firm through the Leadership and Ownership Transition through the Merger Acquisition Experience.

The rolling five-year Clock

Like many Baby Boomers today, as husband and wife partners of an almost 40-year old California architectural firm, we had been contemplating our futures and the future of our firm for some time. Our staff and family affectionately referred to our plan as the rolling five-year clock. At whatever age we have been over the past few years, that five-year look-ahead has rolled along with us while assessing the right move. With the aid of a consultant, we reflected on our firm's potential future, and were faced with a few options: close the door, turn the key, kiss everyone goodbye and go home; groom from within, train rising leaders, find a financially feasible ownership transition strategy for all, and identify rainmakers; consider an Employee Stock Ownership Plan (ESOP) to spread the responsibility and financial security/risk; or consider a merger/acquisition by finding the right partner. We analyzed each option with respect to our goals and priorities.

Options

1. **Closing the doors** is not what we wanted. We had worked hard to build a great studio and staff, and did not want to throw it away. We felt there was value in our staff and their futures, and in our public clientele, who shared our cultural values to make a difference.
2. **Grooming from within** was always of interest to us, providing opportunities for growth to great people we have trusted and have wanted to empower. Questions always arose regarding how to get skin in the game without impacting the financial security of the firm. The responsibility related to marketing and business development to keep work flowing to sustain profitability was an area of mutual concern. Our eventual transition strategy implemented a hybrid of this option.
3. In discussions with our trusted attorneys and accountants, we were convinced that **the ESOP option** was not a good match for us, so we did not pursue it further.

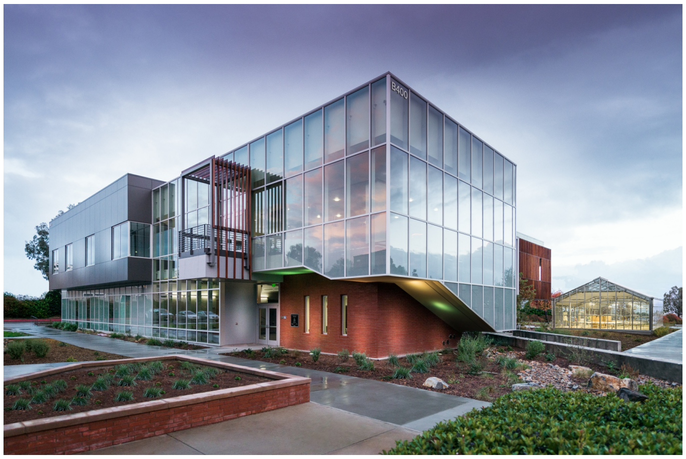
4. The **merger/acquisition** is a topic that led us to consider what would be important to us, and we had been approached in the past. How do we find a collaboration that checks all of the boxes: a firm that values the two of us as the firms founders, where we can be a meaningful part of a transition over a reasonable period of time; a situation that provides financial value for us and for our vested interest leadership; a firm that shares our office culture of mentorship and social responsibility; a firm that values equity and diversity with fair opportunities for advancement and salaries; a firm with a history of sustainable and high performance building design; a firm with compatible design sensibilities; and a firm that offers value to us and we offer value to them.

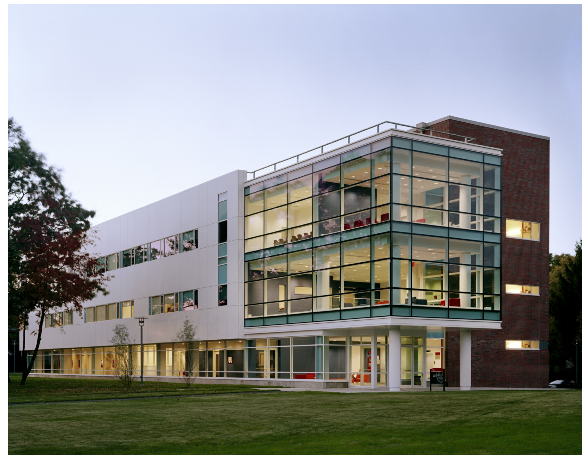
Next steps

To move the process along (we are not getting any younger), we chose to transfer from an LLP, which was suitable for a husband and wife team, to an S Corporation. The S Corp accommodated the sale of shares for a small vested interest in the company to leadership interested in a future with us. This was structured to allow us to follow a strategy of “growing from within”. At this point we were receptive to a merger, but were not actively pursuing one.

There is somebody you should talk to….

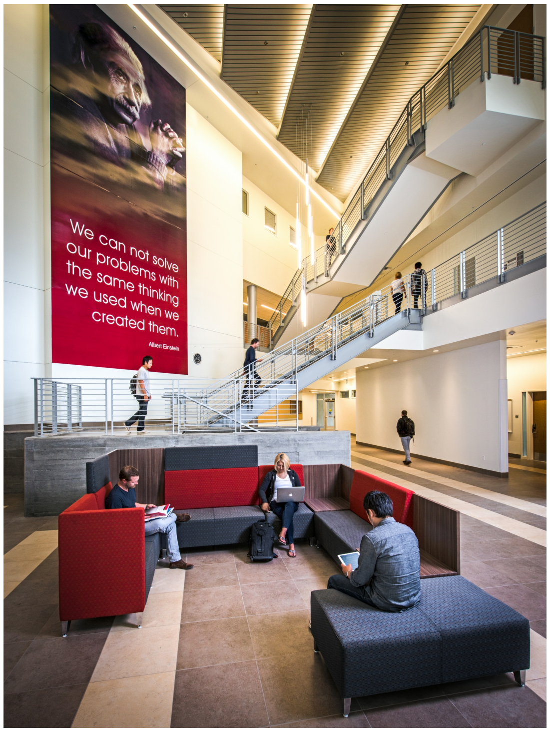
The phone rings at the office one morning, and my husband/partner answers it with a “good to hear from you” reply. It is our consultant (mentioned previously), walking the streets of New York, with a suggestion that “there is somebody you should talk to.” He just left a meeting with the Principal of a large New York Architectural firm which had been growing over the past few years through mergers with selected firms nation-wide and world-wide. California expansion within our practice areas was on his mind, and you might say that our mutual consultant played the role of matchmaker. Two weeks later, we met three representatives of that large New York firm in our office in California on a Saturday. One day and a cordial lunch together was enough to convince us that this opportunity had great potential for each firm. We were looking for a partner that could expand our potential and provide us with the future we were looking for. They were looking for a like-minded firm strategically located to expand their base, and to meet the senior leadership goal of merger with the purchase of shares from those also looking forward to the future. The following pair of images show the matching design sensibilities between the firms.

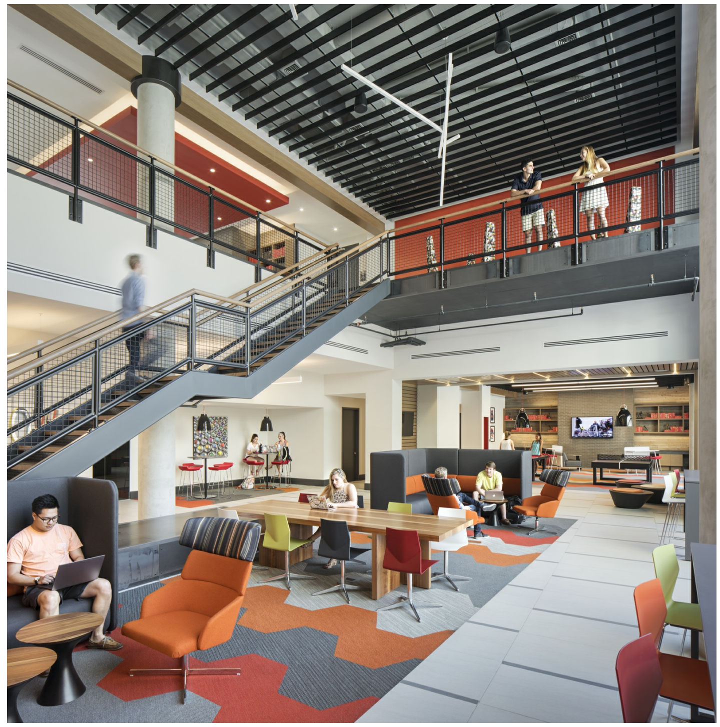




It doesn’t just happen

It was nearly a year before the official merger was complete and went public. Initially, we went through the “getting to know you” period, which was so important. We took time to meet key individuals, visit each other’s offices, discuss money, review respective responsibilities, arrive at a Memorandum of Understanding, get respective attorneys, insurance carriers, and accountants together, and the myriad of considerations that all deserved attention. It far exceeded our expectations in terms of time and effort, but it was a necessary process to confirm that every moving part was coordinated. That included finding a way to enable our vested interest leadership staff to transfer shares to the new merger coming in. That skin in the game ultimately involved five people, including us, who brought with them a strong commitment to success. Interior examples showing the matching design sensibilities between the firms.





Where are we now

It has now been ten months since the merger. It is interesting to note how much has changed and how much has remained the same. Every firm has its own way of managing projects and finances. Even with the same management software platform, this transition has required training and discipline. As we expected, the resources now available to us are remarkable, the firm culture of a studio is still alive and well, and important issues such as mentorship, social responsibility, equity and diversity, sustainability, and design excellence are incredibly compatible and supportive. The California studio is quite pleased to know that we have value that extends to the entire firm, primarily based upon the amazing skill sets that we and our staff bring to the company. Our young California staff are becoming actively engaged in the firm's formal mentorship program, the Women's Leadership Initiative, the Green Committee with their pursuit of the 2030 Challenge, and the Technology committees. We are still dealing with those little unexpected challenges that seem to pop up, and are looking forward to tying up loose ends. We were told to expect the merger to take a year, and we will be just about on schedule.

Finale

In November, we will be celebrating the 40th anniversary of our former firm, and the permanent retirement of our name from the letterhead and front door. It will be a time of final transition, with everything to celebrate, and a good excuse for a party.

Betsey has been active in AIA leadership for 42 years, including AIAOC President, AIA California President, AIA Regional Board of Directors representing California, AIA National Secretary, and Chancellor of the AIA College of Fellows. She remains active in her professional society, and serves on the California Architects Board Professional Qualifications Committee. She also serves as Executive Committee member of the Academy of Neuroscience for Architecture (ANFA), a Latrobe Prize winner. She and her husband and partner Brian recently merged their nearly 40-year old Orange County, California firm, Dougherty Architects, Inc. with Perkins Eastman DPC of New York City. You can reach the author at Betsey.Dougherty@perkinseastman.com.

Practice Management

network.aia.org/blogs/karen-courtney/2019/05/30/strategic-planning-using-vision-values-and-mission

By Karen O. Courtney, AIA, FSMPS, MBA

Just like a building has a strong foundation, an architecture firm should have a strategic plan upon which to build its desired future. The critical foundational elements of vision, values, and mission are described and used to set the goals, strategies and tactics needed for success.

Foundational elements of strategic planning

Historically, strategic planning has been a top-down process that uses a vision reflecting the values of upper management or an architecture firm's founders. This type of strategic planning often caters to short-term results and rarely examines the appropriateness to future conditions or its relevance to all those who have a stake in the organization.

In contrast, the model of today and the future, starts with a vision shared by all those in the organization and is based on values they have in common. It creates the long-term foundation for the firm itself.

Setting forth the vision, values, and mission is the first phase of the strategic planning process. Woven together, they answer a central question: What do we want for our architecture firm in the future?

Vision tells the outside world what the firm, in its "heart of hearts", wants to be recognized for in the future. It is what the firm sees when they look into their crystal ball. Getting to that point often means bringing values to the surface and being aware of the core beliefs that govern what the firm does and are shared by all who lead or aspire to lead the organization. Taken a step further, these core beliefs can also incorporate the collective values of all members of a firm. Determining them can come observationally from examining the conditions when the firm performs at its best or by facilitating a dialogue of what values all believe are important in doing the company's work.

Once a firm's vision is established and its values agreed upon, determining the mission of the organization is next. Mission explains why the organization exists, or put a different way, its purpose or reason for being. A good rule of thumb is a clear mission statement answers the question "Our architecture firm exists to..." and then fills in the blank with the overriding reason why the enterprise was created. Good mission statements should also position an architecture firm in terms of what attracts employees to work there and what draws clients to work with them.

When the building blocks of vision, values, and mission are clear, they can drive a business in a powerful way. A good example from the corporate world is Ben & Jerry's Homemade, Inc. where a basic founding principle and company value was that the company should affect positive societal change. That belief became a measuring stick for all business practices, from procuring raw materials to choosing areas of expansion. And even though Ben & Jerry's was an early adopter of this founding principle, many companies since then have taken a similarly held belief and used it to drive their business practices. From Tom's of Maine to TOMS shoes, other businesses have also used the value of positive societal change to create their desired future.

Maximizing strengths and opportunities

Working from the foundation set by vision, values, and mission, the next phase of the strategic planning process is research and analysis. Research is done to have a factual basis for evaluating current conditions like market share, financial performance, and firm utilization metrics, as well as an honest assessment of both competitors and competitive forces. It is important to gather this research before the strategic planning work begins so that decisions can be made from the basis of fact and not simply opinions. From this research, analysis is done next to identify areas where goals should be established to meet the company's vision.

During the goal setting phase, a "SWOT" analysis is often used, which assesses the company's *Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats*, as well as those of the markets it serves and its competition. The idea is to maximize the firm's own strengths and opportunities and to minimize its weaknesses and threats. From the SWOT process, goals are developed that work toward corrective action or the desired future state. A good goal meets the "SMART" test meaning it is *Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Time bound*. Goals provide the quantitative statements of achievement which, when met, allow an architecture firm to realize its vision.

Another consideration is the time frame for the strategic plan. Most common for an architecture firm is a five-year strategic plan that lays out both the overarching goals to be met in five years, as well as develops annual milestones. Five years is long enough to make significant change, if needed, and yet not so long as to allow for putting things off that demand attention. Also, this time frame can also give architecture firms time to react to market conditions that may present themselves before the five-year planning horizon is complete.

Goals, strategies and tactics

Moving goals from dreams to reality requires a strategy to get from the present state to the desired state. A strategy describes the general approach to meeting the goals and are akin to paths taken to solve an issue. For every goal, there can often be more than one such path or a blend of two or more. Good strategic planning explores multiple strategic paths and often scenario tests them with changing variables to arrive at the desired strategy.

Once a strategy is selected to meet a specific goal, then additional details are needed to actualize the strategy. These are tactics or the “boots on the ground” action items needed to move a goal toward implementation. Tactics describe the step-by-step action items that must occur for the strategy to be fulfilled. With the tactics identified, more detail is added to completely explain how they are actualized. This next level of development is where necessary resources are identified and can include items like budget, person responsible, key performance indicators, and deadlines to track and measure when the goal has been met.

Taken together, each agreed upon goal now has a detailed plan with a strategy (path forward), and the necessary tactics (action steps), together with the resources needed to meet the strategic plans' objectives.

Evaluation

After the plan has been operating for approximately 18 to 24 months, an evaluation should be taken of each goal's performance metrics and the overall strategic plan's consistency to the vision, values, and mission first identified. Sometimes market conditions can present a situation where a reset is necessary to one of the three driving forces (vision, values, or mission) or to a particular goal. Ownership transitions can also lead to the need to reevaluate the goals set to determine if the new firm leaders have the same priorities.

The failure to evaluate vision, values, and mission on an ongoing basis can sometimes lock an organization into activities that do not fit. Evaluations of goal performance measurements may be met, but it is possible that the firm is doing the right things for the wrong reasons. This is a sure path to future problems unless the organization measures the task against the three foundational elements of vision, values, and mission.

Common missteps

Establishing the yearly discipline to check the status of the strategic plan and assess its progress is the key to making the strategic planning process work. Too often once the initial work on strategic planning is done, the excitement starts to fade and the goals are forgotten, hence the strategic plan does not fulfill its promise and firms are discouraged from doing it again. The work to actualize the defined goals is hard and typically involves change to the status quo, so attacking this with a tenacious mindset is required. Or as the old saying goes, nothing hard is ever easy!

Problems also arise when part of the process is circumvented. It is common, for example, to concentrate on the procedural steps of goal setting and simply rely on an existing vision, values, or mission without exploring whether they are all still a good fit. When this occurs, a founder's vision is often used instead of one generated through a group process from the ground-up by current company leaders. This group method uncovers present day common values, and, from the process, a shared vision emerges. However, a ground-up process is not an easy one and often requires help from an outside facilitator to assure that all voices are heard and honored.

Another common misstep is to misjudge both how long the initial phases of strategic planning can take and to forget that the work has only just begun once goals are defined. One to two months is often needed to get the necessary research together so that sound decisions can be made when in the throes of strategic planning. Then the actual development of vision, values, and mission and all the resulting goals to fulfill them can then take another one to two months more. Add in firm-wide communication about the strategic plan and its goals, as they will likely affect many parts and people of a firm, and another month is needed. After all that takes place over three to five months, then the actualizing of the first year's goals can start in earnest with clear direction and commitment by those assigned to them.

Building commitment

Does it matter where the vision, values, and mission of an architecture firm come from? It does if commitment to the organization's plan is important. Commitment is enhanced by sharing the experience of defining or reconfirming the three foundational elements of the strategic planning process - a firm's vision, values, and mission. To create a shared experience could mean getting firm-wide feedback or asking a wide range of employees their thoughts about the future of the company.

Another method of getting commitment is to empower others in the firm by having them participate in the initial goal setting based on the company wide feedback or an initial sense of what needs to be addressed by the company's leaders. This group is then charged with developing the details needed for the goals to be considered and prioritized during the strategic planning process. The leadership or decision-making group now has the detailed information to better evaluate a well-defined set of goals and give the go-ahead to those most appropriate to fulfilling the vision and time-frame of the strategic plan. It is also a good way to let the next generation of leadership within an architecture firm have a taste of the rigor of research and analysis needed for good business planning.

Commitment brings energy and creativity to a job that compliance never could. Starting strategic planning in the middle of the process and emphasizing the strategy, planning, implementation, and evaluation phases leads to compliance not commitment. Engaging the whole firm at the start of the process with defining or affirming vision, values, and mission is a way to build commitment. And in a business environment in which technical superiority and uniqueness is not necessarily proprietary, and in which competition is intense and international, commitment to the job may become the critical edge that determines who survives.

Vision, values, and mission may seem on such a high plane that they have little relevance to the day-to-day operations of an architecture firm. In reality, they permeate every activity. Worked into the fabric of a company, they provide the vitality for staying competitive in an ever-changing and uncertain future.

Karen O. Courtney, AIA, FSMPS, MBA is the Chief Marketing Officer at Fanning Howey, a design firm dedicated to creating next generation learning environments. She was an integral part of the strategic planning process working for three architecture firms and one engineering consulting firm. Karen led the creation of the first comprehensive strategic plan for the Society for Marketing Professional Services when she served as national SMPS President in 2005. She can be reached at work at kcourtney@fhai.com or 317-848-0966.

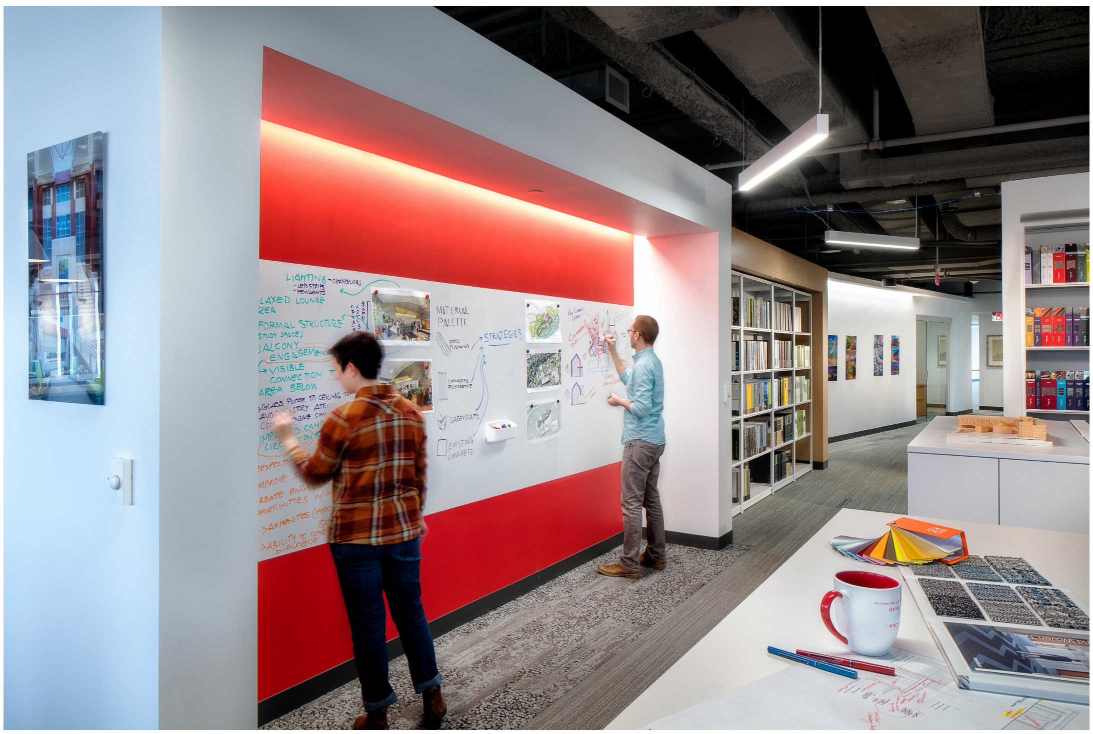
Preparing to launch: Keys to success in a new geographic market

network.aia.org/blogs/jonathan-m-lusin-aia1/2019/05/30/preparing-to-launch-keys-to-success-in-a-new-geogr

Edward A. Shriver Jr.
FAIA

By Jonathan Lusin, Principal, AIA, LEED AP at IKM Architecture

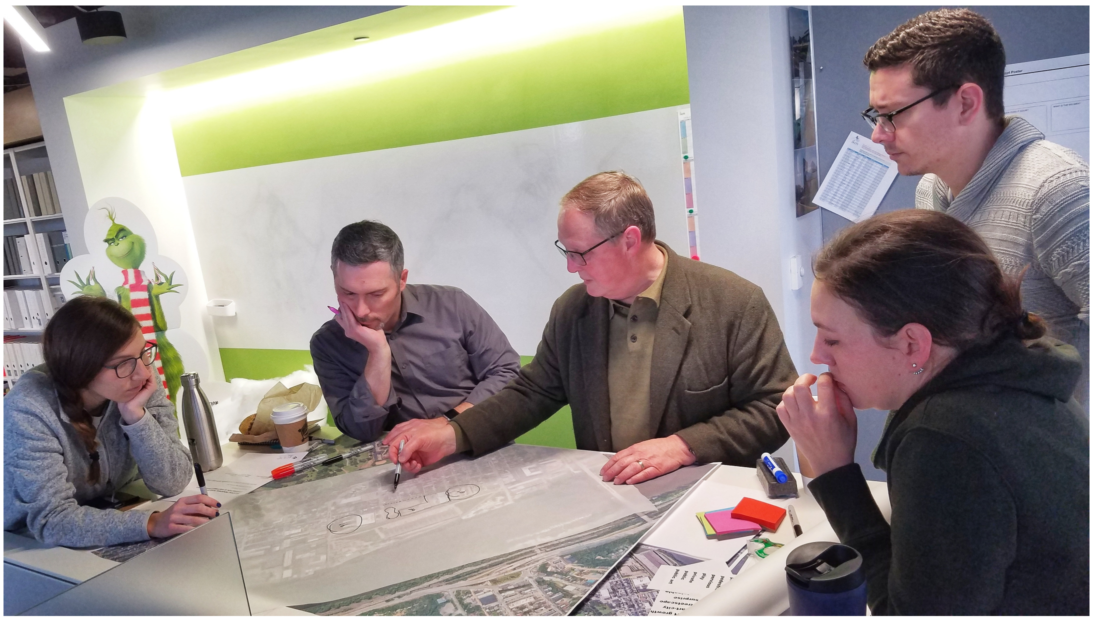
Jonathan Lusin, Principal at IKM Architecture, shares his lessons learned as his firm embarks on growing the firm's first satellite office, launched earlier this year.



Knowing the signs: Reaching market limit & expanding leadership

At some point, growing firms may seize the opportunity to reach beyond their home market. No matter your size, there is a finite number of suitable projects and clients a firm can acquire and support in a given region. On top of that, architectural firm owners need the talent to produce great work. For single-office firms, this realization can prompt a great deal of introspection for leadership about where and *how* to grow outside of their comfort zone.

In my experience, one of the first steps a firm should take is promoting individuals to new leadership levels to create a foundation strong enough to withstand change. New leaders can take on management responsibilities aligned with their strengths, while existing leaders can focus on growth and development in new territories. This process can take several forms, but the constant is that firm ownership must be committed to fully engage in a new geographic market. To ensure a steady presence, an individual from existing leadership should be chosen as the face of the firm in developing that new market.



Targeting opportunity: Geographic expansion & market development

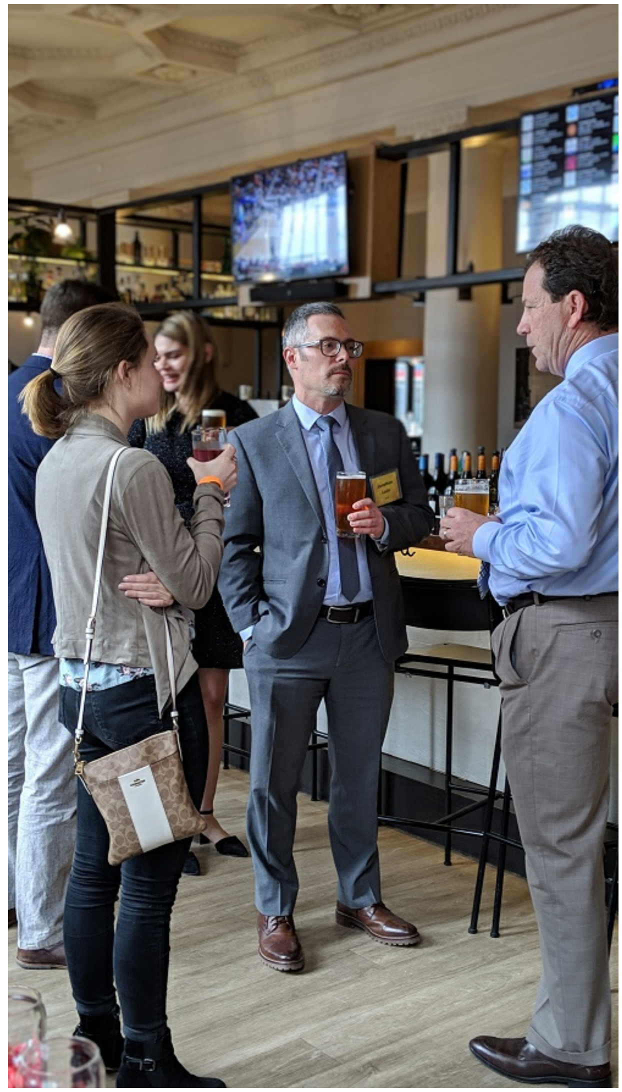
Researching the economic picture of a potential new market is critical to finding the right fit. Firms must determine how the current and imminent economic indicators align with the firm's growth strategy. On top of economic viability, evaluate how your firm can take advantage of the market's potential for new talent and consultant collaborations. Another consideration should be researching local architectural practices for possible long-term partnerships. Once there is an understanding of the business focuses and cultures of both parties, this could lead to productive outcomes in the future. Careful evaluation of the collaboration would help both organizations to consider an opportunity to join forces as one organization.

It is up to firm leadership to determine the attitude and services the organization will take to this new market. One important decision is whether to market the firm as a generalist or a specialist. Is the firm going to put roots down or remain an "out of town" expert that will draw on knowledge from its home operations? The subject-matter experts in arm must be willing to regularly travel and engage with existing and potential clients. A large hurdle that firms face in new markets is how to hire locally to both supplement the firm's thought leaders and enable proper servicing of new clients. Selecting the proper individuals to be the foundation for a healthy new office demands careful data and research to inform the decision-making of firm leadership.

Transferring culture: What stays & what goes

Each office will develop its own rhythm and culture based on the individuals who are a part of it. When expansions happen, it's important that leadership understands the identity of the firm versus the flexible identities of its satellite offices. Ask yourself what aspects of your brand make the firm special to not only your clients, but employees as well. If maintaining a consistent culture is valued, focus on creating a program for immersing new employees into the firm. James Dudt, PE, LEED AP BD+C and Director of Karpinski Engineering's Pittsburgh office does just that. He says, "In the most successful case, a new graduate engineer spent 18 months in Cleveland and then relocated to Pittsburgh. Orientation "Bootcamps" can also bring new hires together from the firm and creates a cohort experience filled with both social and technical training."

Employee onboarding is only one aspect of building culture in a new market. Branding and communications is also a key part of supplementing budding relationships with digital storytelling and industry thought leadership. Nothing beats in-person interaction, so set up as many opportunities to expose potential clients to the depth and breadth of your organization with the people who make your organization great. IKM found a great angle to host a launch party at the new, trendy food hall which attracted many individuals from the AEC industry.



In it for the long haul: Plan beyond the launch party

Giving the green light is the easy part. Building a sustainable brand in a new market requires focused selling. Determining this focus will depend on the strengths of your organization. For IKM, we know that we are a regional firm with extensive background in technically complex projects. To get that message across, firm owners and marketers should prioritize constant follow up with potential clients and partners to cultivate relationships that will develop into strategic partnerships when the right project comes along.

This process involves patience and foresight; firms seeking lasting growth should initiate a multi-year plan with measurable milestones and yearly reporting on ROI. Time and energy should be spent on winning work that makes your firm thrive in the long-term. Beware the "sugar highs" of quick wins.

Last, but not least, never forget that you are entering an entirely new community and must earn a place there. Leverage your existing relationships, but also maintain high visibility at industry events. Know your audience by immersing yourself in the culture of the new market and finding ways to give back. Make your purpose clear. At IKM, we make sure people know our “why:” we strive to make a difference for every person, institution, and project we engage with. Know your “why,” and the rest will follow.

Jonathan Lusin is a Principal at IKM Architecture and strategic leader of the firm’s growing Cleveland market. Mr. Lusin specializes in workplace environments for corporate clients with additional expertise in designing for higher education and healthcare facilities. You can reach Jonathan Lusin at jlusin@ikminc.com or

(216) 678-9456.