

Continuing Education for Developing Architects

More Not-So-Secret Continuing-Education Ideas

by Steven G. Shapiro

In his article, "Some (Not-So) Secrets of Establishing an Architecture Practice," [http://www.aia.org/aiaarchitect/thisweek06/0630/0630bp_jacktrain.cfm], Jack Train, FAIA, addresses the daunting tasks of hiring, training, and promoting young architects. Noting the vision and patience that is required of management, Train describes the measures necessary to maintain the tradition, excellence, and profitability of the architecture firm. Train preaches the craft of architecture, the benefits of the mentoring process, and notes that architects should be introduced to a broad array of skills.

In addition to his suggestions, young architects should be encouraged, and perhaps offered economic incentives and time flexibility, to continue both formal and informal education in the design field and related disciplines. Among the many challenges of starting a career, the intern must learn not only his or her craft, but also the business of the architecture firm and the business of the clients. As Train notes, conceptual design is just a portion of the process of architecture.

Interns should be encouraged to join industry groups, attend seminars and conferences, write articles, and seek speaking engagements. In addition, interns should be encouraged to enroll in a relevant course or even seek an advanced degree, perhaps in architecture or business administration. It is true that interns have overwhelming demands on their time for both professional and personal

interests. Still, continuing education is a fundament for future excellence.

For instance, for an architectural firm with a division that designs hospitals, the architect might be well-served by enrolling in a community college class on health-care facility management. For a firm that is known for creating trophy buildings intended for law firms, the architect might attend American Bar Association seminars on practice management. At least anecdotally, clients reward and return to architects and firms who understand their business.

As a separate issue, young architects do not always understand the demands of firm management, including cash flow, business development, and managing professionals and staff. Most business administration programs offer courses that teach the fundamental elements of managing and operating a business. In addition, the architect should have the proficiency to write clearly and effectively and should practice their writing skills.

The resources available to architects are seemingly endless, subject to the ambition of the individual, including colleges, online programs, national and local chapters of the AIA, and continuing education. Senior management can learn valuable information about their interns by simple observation. Some interns will gravitate toward speaking events, while others show an interest in business development, and some others fail to show any discernable interest in continuing their education.

Jack Train's impassioned advice on the merits of investing in young architects is undeniable. For the willing firm and the driven architect, the first years of practice can be a fundamental investment for later returns.

Reference:

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