

The Business of Architecture

Sometimes, the most important decisions can strike others as inscrutable.

Though others might not understand it, my recent decision to leave the business world to pursue a graduate degree in architecture was both sincere and certain. With an undergraduate degree in business, extensive professional experience at a Fortune 100 Company, and an M.Arch degree in the imminent future, I aspire to influence design decisions that will shape and reinvent the built environment in years to come.

In design studios, effective problem-solving requires creativity, intuition and intelligence to draw upon diverse data. Indeed, I soon came to learn that, as in business, competent strategies in my architectural career demanded thoughtful analyses of issues, constraints, and unknowns. It is not simply about the provocative design – but the articulation of the strategy, the process, the implications.

Even more important than the unusual course of study I have taken, is my exposure to and experience working with key decision makers in a real, corporate environment. Having had a progressive career at a global financial services company, I have developed the rigor and patience to probe and understand the vast array of stakeholders involved in large corporate initiatives – their often competing needs, challenges and concerns. As an architect, I will necessarily have to influence constituents across all levels and bring clarity to complex situations. Within the discourse of corporate architecture, similar skills will be leveraged to achieve consensus and deliver results in a highly matrixed environment.

Given the current global recession, dismal billings and waves of postponed or cancelled projects, it is likely the architectural profession will continue to contract in the near future. However, corporate architects are in ideal positions to add measurable value to their organizations and help clients improve the bottom line. With cost-cutting across all sectors, it is critical that the quality of our built-environment is not marginalized. While new “soup-to-nuts” projects may be at a standstill, issues of sustainability and energy efficiency can remain or become strategic priorities if presented by a compelling advocate; this will require fluency in not only smart-design, but economics, and the ability to transverse between the two. Having been on both sides of the fence, I can be in a unique position to ensure design-based issues remain at the forefront.

Indeed, while enigmatic for most, it is for the juncture of these two professions that I left a career in business to pursue one in architecture.