



Practice Management Digest

News & Best Practices from the PM Knowledge Community



Print this page



Email this page

Features

Leading Yourself: Overcoming Leadership Blind Spots

by Christine Cowan-Gascoigne, MBA, MSSA, LISW

Effective leaders exhibit a high level of consistency between words and actions. Our ability to lead others is linked inextricably to our ability to lead ourselves.

> [Read](#)

Leading Your Client

by Stephen T. Swicegood, FAIA

Stephen Swicegood describes the behaviors essential to effective leadership and how these behaviors relate to client leadership.

> [Read](#)

Leading Your Project Team: An Emerging Project Leadership Model

by James M. Suehiro, AIA, LEED AP

To meet the need for faster project delivery and greater accuracy, and to improve opportunities for more sustainable construction, a transformed project delivery model is required. As this transformation evolves, the need for highly integrated, highly effective and highly responsive teams increases.

> [Read](#)

Leading Your Firm

by Hugh Hochberg

In an architecture firm, the path to becoming an effective firm leader means striking a reasonable balance among roles and activities that sometimes conflict.

> [Read](#)

Leading Your Profession

by Andrea Cohen Gehring, FAIA, LEED AP

As a leader, you provide a valuable service to the profession. Help to keep it vital by promoting interaction and the exchange of ideas, and serve as a valuable example and mentor to young colleagues.

> [Read](#)

Leading Your Community

by Ambassador Richard N. Swett, FAIA

An architect's unique set of problem solving skills, creativity, and understanding of collaborative processes can truly make a difference in our communities and in larger society.

> [Read](#)

News

Letter From the Editor

Guest editor Robert P. Smith, AIA, discusses how this issue of the Digest addresses the multiple dimensions of leadership.

> [Read the full letter](#)

Summer 2008

In This Issue

- > Letter from the Editor
- > Leading Your Client
- > Leading Your Community
- > Leading Your Firm
- > Leading Your Profession
- > Leading Your Project Team: An Emerging Project Leadership Model
- > Leading Yourself: Overcoming Leadership Blind Spots

Archive

- > Winter Issue
- > Fall 2009
- > Summer 2009
- > Recession Issue
- > Spring 2009
- > Fall 2008
- > Summer 2008
- > Spring 2008
- > Fall 2007
- > Summer 2007
- > Spring 2007
- > Winter 2006
- > Fall 2006
- > Summer 2006
- > Winter 2005/2006
- > Summer 2005
- > Spring 2005
- > Winter 2004
- > Fall 2004
- > Summer 2004
- > Spring 2004
- > Winter 2004
- > October 2003
- > August 2003

Resources

2008 AIA Practice Management Fall Conference

Chicago, IL

October 14 - 17, 2008

Call For Presentations

The focus of the 2008 AIA Practice Management conference will be Leveraging Your Resources. This conference will provide tangible resources and take-home tools, using actual spreadsheets, databases, and management skills created through hands-on sessions and workshops. These tools will be geared toward small and mid-sized firms but will be scaleable for the larger firm platform. Additional details will be posted on the [PMKC website](#).

AIA Practice Management at National Convention

The PMKC will have a strong presence at the [2008 AIA National Convention](#). We encourage you to select your continuing educational opportunities wisely by looking for the most appropriate classes. Here are just a few that touch on the many aspects of Practice Management:

[WE59 Managing Design: An Oxymoron for the Ages?](#)

[WE13 Project Finance for Project Managers and Managing Principals](#)

[WE12 Do It Yourself Quality Management: An Architect's Workshop to Implementing Quality Management](#)

[WE56 Presenting with Conviction, Confidence, and Clarity: How to Persuade Clients to Hire You](#)

[FR62 A Workforce of Tethered Millennials: Hiring the Next Generation](#)

[SA46 Leveraging Your Resources: AIA Practice Management Seminar and Luncheon](#)



Practice Management Digest

News & Best Practices from the PM Knowledge Community  Print this page |  Email this page

Leading Yourself: Overcoming Leadership Blind Spots

by Christine Cowan-Gascoigne, MBA, MSSA, LISW

It's a well known fact that communication effectiveness is based 7% on the words we use, 38% on our tone of voice and 55% on what people see us do. When "what we say" and "what we do" are inconsistent, others take cues from what we do. Effective leaders exhibit a high level of consistency between words and actions. Our ability to lead others is linked inextricably to our ability to lead ourselves.

Executives and managers in all areas of business tend to say (and believe) one thing and yet, unconsciously, do another. Not about everything – the subjects that trip us up differ – but we all have blind spots about our jobs, about our organizations, about others and especially about ourselves.

This happens for two reasons: Most of us don't seek feedback. We may even avoid feedback if we sense dissatisfaction. But, even when we do solicit feedback, others may be uncomfortable cooperating for reasons that range from not wanting to upset us (at best) to fear of retribution (at worst). If trust doesn't exist, the person approached for feedback may even provide false or misleading information. Obtaining objective and constructive feedback, no matter how distressing, is critical to our ability to grow and develop and, in some cases, it may be necessary to survive.

Working with both men and women in professional service and manufacturing firms, I have discovered that personal or organizational crises invariably are triggered by blind spots. Problems evident to others often are not apparent to the individual, or group, causing them. That is, until the bridge collapses, the project bombs, the client changes firms, the bank forecloses, the key employee quits, your department is downsized or – most noticeably – you are fired. The cost both personally and organizationally of these blind spots is huge and avoidable.

Whether your organization has a formal 360° feedback system or not, we all need to develop and implement a formal system to elicit feedback from supervisors (in the case of principals, consider asking your Managing Principal to participate), colleagues, and subordinates. Feedback from supervisors is not enough. Our peers and subordinates often have the most insightful comments. The challenge we face with supervisors, peers and subordinates is gaining access to their honest and candid views. Here are a few tips for setting up your feedback system.

- Secure a neutral interviewer or coach, someone you respect and trust, to gather and synthesize the data. While large firms may have someone in their human resource departments who can do this, those of you in smaller firms will need to search for a coach. There are many management consultants around who can serve in this capacity, for a fee. Other recommendations can be gathered from the business school at local universities, trusted clients, colleagues and even your local AIA component.
- Meet with the interviewer to discuss the process, your goals, your perspectives on your strengths and development needs, and "special" issues you want probed.
- The interviewer should
 - Meet individually with your supervisor, 2 or 3 other members of higher management with whom you interact and 2 or 3 of your peers to gain perspective on your strengths and development needs. In some cases, key vendors or longstanding clients may be good sources of data.
 - Conduct a focus group of your employees and colleagues, asking for their perspectives on your strengths and development needs. In cases

Winter 2009

In This Issue

Archive

- > [Winter Issue](#)
- > [Fall 2009](#)
- > [Summer 2009](#)
- > [Recession Issue](#)
- > [Spring 2009](#)
- > [Fall 2008](#)
- > [Summer 2008](#)
- > [Spring 2008](#)
- > [Fall 2007](#)
- > [Summer 2007](#)
- > [Spring 2007](#)
- > [Winter 2006](#)
- > [Fall 2006](#)
- > [Summer 2006](#)
- > [Winter 2005/2006](#)
- > [Summer 2005](#)
- > [Spring 2005](#)
- > [Winter 2004](#)
- > [Fall 2004](#)
- > [Summer 2004](#)
- > [Spring 2004](#)
- > [Winter 2004](#)
- > [October 2003](#)
- > [August 2003](#)

where group cohesion is lacking, one-on-one interviews might be needed.

--Observe you on-the-job for half a day to look for concrete examples of the behaviors that have been mentioned by others. Even though you know you are being observed, the behaviors will surface because you are unaware of them. If your interactions vary dramatically with the setting (e.g., onsite versus in the office), consider observations in each setting.

--Synthesize input from interviews, focus groups and observations to identify your areas of leadership development leverage.

--Meet with you to review the data and findings.

--If time constraints prevent collecting all suggested data, the interviewer should gather some input from each perspective (supervisor, peers, employees). Try not to sacrifice the half-day of observations, which almost always provides the most helpful data.

- Expect some surprises and disappointments. You are unearthing issues not known to you previously. Executives often express feelings of hurt, anger, confusion, denial, defensiveness, and betrayal at this stage. What separates "leaders" from "leader wannabees" is the ability to channel those feelings into positive and productive change. Remember, most of what you learn is widely known already by those who work with you. Isn't it better that you know it, too? Additionally, executives with the strength to participate in this feedback process earn sympathy and admiration from those around them. Many former critics become advocates once they have "dumped" on you without retaliation.
- Based on what you've learned, work with your coach to establish leadership development goals including an action plan and milestones.
- Meet with your employees to share the results of the process and the goals you have set. During this session, avoid the temptation to attribute particular pieces of feedback to individuals. Explain how you intend to change your behavior. Ask for their help in keeping you on track. Your openness and dedication to ferreting out behaviors that impede organizational effectiveness will impress most of them.
- Draft a memo to others who participated in the process, thanking them and mentioning one or two changes you are making (assuming there are any!) as a result of their feedback.
- Six months after setting your goals, survey your employees anonymously regarding the extent to which they have seen improvements. Ask for suggestions about how to continue progress. Typically, surveys of employees 6 months post-process show that greater than 85% perceive improvements in the executive's leadership skills.

Your future depends on overcoming leadership blind spots. Learn to seek and act on constructive feedback. Become the leader you always wanted to be, or thought you were.

Christine Cowan-Gascoigne is President and Founder of The Leadership Company in Cleveland, Ohio, an Adjunct Professor at Case Western Reserve University teaching leadership theory and practice, a former consultant with McKinsey & Company and a graduate of the Harvard Graduate School of Business Administration. Consistent with her interest in human development, she also serves as a Licensed Independent Social Worker at Hopewell, a therapeutic farm community in Mesopotamia, Ohio for adults with mental illness.



Practice Management Digest

News & Best Practices from the PM Knowledge Community  Print this page |  Email this page

Leading Your Client

by Stephen T. Swicegood, FAIA

If we are being honest with each other, many here would agree with my college friend who characterized his experiences with clients as, "I feel like I'm in a cage and they're outside poking me through the bars with sticks." Because this view is so widespread, we need to start our discussion of client leadership by trying to understand why so many of us feel such profound frustration when it comes to dealing with our clients.

Over the years, I have met way too many architects who, like my college friend, have lost the joy of architecture. We often feel disrespected and disregarded. We get frustrated when clients don't seem to "get" what we're recommending. And when we experience these difficulties, we often get down on ourselves. This is not a good mental state from which to lead effectively.

When we understand why we have these challenges, it's much easier to work on adapting our natural style to succeed with clients. Many architects, particularly those in leadership positions, share similar personality traits. In Myers-Briggs typology, we are often Intuitive and Judgmental (INTJ). On the DISC scale, we're typically high on Dominance and low on Influencing.

In plain English, most of us know exactly what we want to do (intuitive) and how we want to do it (high dominance). We are impatient with those who think differently than us (judgmental), and we're not inclined to work very hard to get people to see things our way (low influence). These common personality characteristics are important because they create real roadblocks for architects who want to become effective client leaders.

But let's assume that you understand and accept these challenges, and that you still want to lead clients. How do you develop yourself into an effective leader? Barry Posner and Jim Kouzes have conducted years of research on leadership. In their book *The Leadership Challenge*, they describe four behaviors essential to effective leadership. With thanks to them, I want to show how these behaviors relate to client leadership.

1. Model the Way

This means communicating your values and aligning your actions with those values. This is the "walk the talk" part of client leadership. Believe it or not, clients will respect you even if your values are not their values.

The best time to start earning that respect is at the interview. Instead of trying to tell the client what you think they want to hear, why not state strongly what you believe architecture should accomplish, in terms of its impact on the users and the community. If it becomes apparent that these values don't resonate with the client, point out the gap and probe for the reasons. Sometimes you discover that you're more aligned than you thought, sometimes not. You won't win them all this way but, when you do, the client relationship will start off on the right foot.

2. Challenge the Process

Many architects of my generation were thrilled by Howard Roark's fierce independence in *The Fountainhead*. Of course, in the real world, design and construction is a team sport and most clients want team players on their team. But, being a team player doesn't mean being a doormat to client whims.

Recently, I was listening to a client talk about renovating a facility to make it more efficient. Her straightforward approach was to reduce the sizes of the workspaces. At a pause in the conversation, I quietly asked how she thought her people would feel about this downsizing. Her expression became

Winter 2009

In This Issue

Archive

- > [Winter Issue](#)
- > [Fall 2009](#)
- > [Summer 2009](#)
- > [Recession Issue](#)
- > [Spring 2009](#)
- > [Fall 2008](#)
- > [Summer 2008](#)
- > [Spring 2008](#)
- > [Fall 2007](#)
- > [Summer 2007](#)
- > [Spring 2007](#)
- > [Winter 2006](#)
- > [Fall 2006](#)
- > [Summer 2006](#)
- > [Winter 2005/2006](#)
- > [Summer 2005](#)
- > [Spring 2005](#)
- > [Winter 2004](#)
- > [Fall 2004](#)
- > [Summer 2004](#)
- > [Spring 2004](#)
- > [Winter 2004](#)
- > [October 2003](#)
- > [August 2003](#)

concerned. Finally, she said, "I hadn't really thought about that! We need to look at this more thoughtfully and make sure we give people what they need to do their work." One of the greatest compliments an architect can get is when the client says, "I would never have thought to do it this way, but I see now that it was exactly the right thing to do."

3. Enable Others to Act

Enabling others to act gets to an issue I've heard many architects gripe about: the loss of our position as "leader of the building team." In our efforts to manage risk, many of us have become reluctant, even fearful, to be the leader of the team. That's unfortunate. In my experience, there aren't many people who can stay focused on an inspiring vision and simultaneously figure out how to get it done. However, architects are uniquely qualified and motivated to keep these two important elements of project delivery in balance.

Ten years ago, my firm was working on a very complex \$35 million corporate office renovation. Getting all of the client's constituents to act together was difficult. Without really planning to, our Principal often found himself facilitating the project meetings, coaxing reluctant players and mediating disputes. One day, the client's project executive asked for a private meeting. He confessed that he didn't feel capable of leading the project to a successful conclusion, and asked if we would be willing to take over as manager of the entire project, not just the design. Our firm got a nice additional service fee, and the client saw their project completed on time and on budget!

4. Encourage your Heart

This may sound a bit "new age," but it's a proven component of success. By definition, a leader can't lead without followers, and you can't expect someone to follow you if you don't appear confident and optimistic. The 2002 AIA study *The Client Experience* noted that when the client starts spending real money on construction, the architect is usually reducing his presence on the job. No wonder so many clients feel abandoned by their architect in their hour of need.

I recall being asked to troubleshoot a large project that was in construction and behind schedule. True to form, we were running out of fee and had been understaffing the CA phase. The client was losing faith in us. I invited him to lunch and laid out a plan to dedicate a staff member to the project full time, to expedite construction. He was delighted (and encouraged) to see this change of attitude on our part. Then I told him the two things I wanted if we were to be able to complete the project successfully: a good reference to other clients, and fair consideration of additional compensation for the increased services we provided. No contract amendments were executed. This was all about turning the client's emotional state around, from mistrust to believing in us again. The project ended successfully. I can't say we were made whole financially, but we did receive significant additional compensation and, more importantly, the client raved about our work when giving interviews and presentations about the project to industry groups.

Now that you've read through the bulk of this article learning HOW to lead clients, you may want to ask yourself WHY you want to be a client leader in the first place. If you're not very clear about your reasons, you likely will have a hard time leading clients successfully, and you will end up feeling like you're in that cage being poked with sticks.

From my perspective, there are three main goals for any architectural project:

1. A quality design that pleases your staff and that you can use for marketing
2. A quality experience for the client, leading to repeat work and/or positive references
3. A profit for your firm

Achieving these goals does not happen automatically and you must take proactive steps to lead both the client and the process in order to be successful. A big part of client leadership is to achieve as much in each of these areas as possible.

In my experience, few projects satisfy all 3 of the goals listed above. When one does, I consider that one to be a memorable project. Meeting 2 of 3 goals means a good project that can be used to build your business. Meeting only 1 of 3 goals may not hurt your firm, but neither will it help you grow your business. A 1 goal project simply consumes resources that could have been deployed better elsewhere. Meeting 0 of 3 goals means a toxic project that probably has damaged your firm - these are to be avoided at all costs!

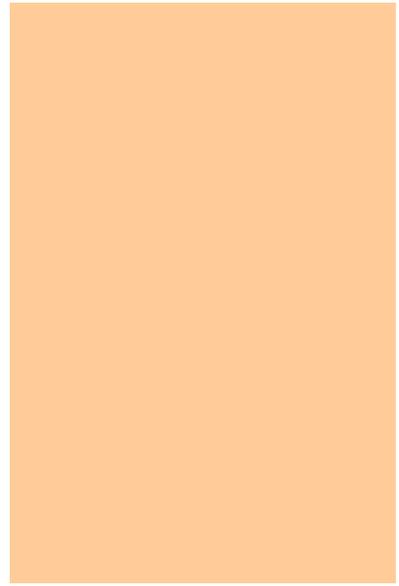
Next time you're facing a tough client leadership dilemma, step back and think about which of the 3 goals your actions will accomplish. If you achieve number

2, then perhaps you'll receive a note like this one:

"I had a great moment when I walked onto the site today. I looked up and said to myself 'I can't believe they're letting us build this!' Which is to say that I am thrilled by the ambitious design vision and grateful for the professional skills you have applied to achieve that vision. I will have anxiety until after opening day, but I'm glad we're taking this chance together."

I think most of us would get up pretty early in the morning every day to earn this kind of feedback from our clients.

Stephen T. Swicegood, FAIA is Managing Director of Gensler's 75-person Atlanta office. Other firms he has led include Heery International's London office, and idea/span in Atlanta. He began professional practice in 1973, after graduating from Auburn University. He was elevated to Fellow of the AIA in 2004 for advancing the profession in the area of workplace design.





Practice Management Digest

News & Best Practices from the PM Knowledge Community  Print this page |  Email this page

Leading Your Project Team: An Emerging Project Leadership Model

by James M. Suehiro, AIA, LEED AP

To meet the need for faster project delivery and greater accuracy, and to improve opportunities for more sustainable construction, a transformed project delivery model is required. As this transformation evolves, the need for highly integrated, highly effective and highly responsive teams increases. Project team leadership also must evolve to address efficiency without sacrificing excellence; to achieve “the best answer the fastest” for any means of project delivery.

In its various forms, Integrated Project Delivery (IPD) aims to optimize the project process. In its most developed form, IPD aligns owner, designer and constructor under a single multi-party or “alliance”-type agreement, where all constituencies share a project’s ownership, success and, ultimately, risk.

To address the unique needs of all IPD models, project leaders must provide specialized knowledge and skills across diverse disciplines to implement integrated design concepts. This need requires the single-entity leader model to evolve into a multi-disciplinary project leadership team. This re-structuring will cause a transformation within the culture of the leadership model. The team-based leadership concept is also effective when applied to traditional project delivery methods, such as design-bid-build.

For a highly collaborative team to be successful, leadership must provide an “open environment” where all members are aligned to common goals. One simple way to encourage such interaction is through regularly-scheduled team meetings where the project process itself is “designed”. These design sessions identify the goals and tasks to be accomplished, assign responsibilities, and establish deadlines for completion. By placing everything in full view via a calendar/task list, everyone can provide input, has the opportunity to propose ideas, and remains on the same page throughout the course of the project. These sessions also are an effective communication forum with external stakeholders and regulatory agencies.

By addressing issues openly and collectively, participants can focus on progress, clarity and transparency of communications. Project leaders who embrace an open environment management style celebrate the value of collaboration. This style requires project leaders to possess well-honed skills in moderating both design team discussions and public forums.

The “core team” model of a project leadership brings together individuals with disparate expertise and skills—such as the project owner, designer and contractor—to serve as “functional” leaders responsible for various pieces of project performance. The client member also serves as the team’s “accountability” leader who is ultimately responsible for the project.

The next layer of leadership includes a core team for each of the participating functional leaders: owner, designer and contractor. For example, the design core team is comprised of experts in the areas of process, design—including both architecture and engineering design leads—delivery, and communications. Functional leadership in each of these areas varies according to project need. The process leader, or project manager, remains ultimately accountable for the design team’s performance on the project.

This model’s benefits can be seen in its highly collaborative team culture, decision-making effectiveness and responsiveness. Its unique culture 1) promotes respect among members, regardless of background, age or tenure 2) encourages ideation and 3) values breadth and depth of knowledge,

Winter 2009

In This Issue

Archive

- > [Winter Issue](#)
- > [Fall 2009](#)
- > [Summer 2009](#)
- > [Recession Issue](#)
- > [Spring 2009](#)
- > [Fall 2008](#)
- > [Summer 2008](#)
- > [Spring 2008](#)
- > [Fall 2007](#)
- > [Summer 2007](#)
- > [Spring 2007](#)
- > [Winter 2006](#)
- > [Fall 2006](#)
- > [Summer 2006](#)
- > [Winter 2005/2006](#)
- > [Summer 2005](#)
- > [Spring 2005](#)
- > [Winter 2004](#)
- > [Fall 2004](#)
- > [Summer 2004](#)
- > [Spring 2004](#)
- > [Winter 2004](#)
- > [October 2003](#)
- > [August 2003](#)

regardless of tenure. This highly collaborative model empowers and encourages members throughout the problem-solving process, making it highly effective in arriving at the best answer fastest.

A core team comprised of an architect, interior designer, lighting designer and environmental graphic designer, was asked by a client to “improve the passenger experience and the sense of arrival specific to place” at the international arrivals terminal of an airport. The two least-tenured team members, including a recently-graduated interior designer and a recently-licensed architect, proposed a conceptual approach to the problem that was immediately accepted by the group. This example illustrates a collaborative environment where the best idea, from members with the least experience, was acknowledged by senior leaders accountable for the outcome of the work.

Today the complexities of design and delivery require contributions from individuals who possess diverse capabilities. The core team leadership model provides a diverse, knowledgeable and skilled leadership team where each member’s contributions are respected, encouraged and valued—all focused on delivery speed and accuracy of an excellent building design.

James M. Suehiro, AIA, LEED AP is a Principal at NBBJ providing architecture, planning, and design services. He earned a Bachelor of Arts in Environmental Design and a Master of Architecture from the University of Washington. Jim is the AIA Northwest and Pacific Region Director on the AIA National Board 2006 – 2008, Chair of the Board Integrated Practice Discussion Group and is representative to the 3xPT Strategy Group (CURT, AGC, and AIA) focused on industry transformation of the project delivery process.



Practice Management Digest

News & Best Practices from the PM Knowledge Community

Print this page | Email this page

Leading Your Firm

by Hugh Hochberg

Successful leaders in architecture firms do just that—they lead. How do they lead? They lead by defining and communicating values and direction (vision); enabling people to grow, advance, and satisfy themselves professionally; setting, communicating, and living up to high standards; communicating and achieving balance among the firm's professional, cultural, and business aspects; and bringing clients and projects to the firm—either directly or indirectly.

Although the two concepts must coexist, leadership and management are not the same and it helps to understand the distinctions. Management confers authority on individuals, whereas the influence that comes from leadership can only be earned. Leaders earn their influence because people want to go where the leader is headed, no matter whom the organization designates as the "leader."

In design firms, the people who rise to positions of significant leadership generally will demonstrate many, if not all, of the following characteristics:

- The ability to establish and communicate a clear vision for the firm's future, including the type of clients and projects sought, the role of design in achieving client and firm satisfaction, technology choices, financial goals, professional gratification, internal culture, external image, and social, civic, and environmental involvement.
- The energy, focus, and commitment to inspire others to embrace a common vision and to work toward its attainment. That inspiration is reflected in the work the firm pursues, the talent the firm recruits, the creative and quality goals the firm establishes, the technologies the firm adopts, and the extent to which internal colleagues collaborate and pursue a common objective.
- The capacity to overcome self doubt and convey confidence to their followers. Such confidence is most effective when grounded in an understanding of risks and impediments, leading to mitigating strategies. Leaders thoughtfully initiate actions to deal with variables such as shifting market conditions, new competitors, quality concerns, organizational culture, and financial performance.
- High performance standards for themselves and others. The most effective leaders do more than simply challenge others to achieve these standards—they actively support, nurture, and develop others so that success is highly probable.
- The flexibility and the ability to acknowledge failure, abandon unsuccessful approaches, and develop new ones. Alone, or with input from others, firm leaders determine when to shift marketing priorities, when to bring in new talent, when to apply new technologies, and when to elevate others into roles where their leadership potential can blossom.
- Decisiveness when addressing nonperforming members of the firm, either through increasing developmental attention or dismissal.
- Credibility arising from success with clients and projects. Time in the trenches, usually with project responsibility, increases the leader's connection with individuals in the firm.
- Willingness to carry the torch in the firm and in the community and, by so doing, to pave the way for others to lead, to manage internally, and to bring in work from past and new clients.
- Self-confidence and a willingness to support the recognition of others in the firm as leaders, or potential leaders. Firm leaders aren't threatened by the prospect that others also may be strong leaders; their self-confidence allows them to foster the growth of others.
- Recognition of the distinctions between "leadership" and "management." Firm leaders don't confuse the authority of the latter

Winter 2009

In This Issue

Archive

- > [Winter Issue](#)
- > [Fall 2009](#)
- > [Summer 2009](#)
- > [Recession Issue](#)
- > [Spring 2009](#)
- > [Fall 2008](#)
- > [Summer 2008](#)
- > [Spring 2008](#)
- > [Fall 2007](#)
- > [Summer 2007](#)
- > [Spring 2007](#)
- > [Winter 2006](#)
- > [Fall 2006](#)
- > [Summer 2006](#)
- > [Winter 2005/2006](#)
- > [Summer 2005](#)
- > [Spring 2005](#)
- > [Winter 2004](#)
- > [Fall 2004](#)
- > [Summer 2004](#)
- > [Spring 2004](#)
- > [Winter 2004](#)
- > [October 2003](#)
- > [August 2003](#)

with the energy of the former. Firm leaders know that both are necessary and recognize that effective leadership reduces the need for formal management. Except in firms where strong management is a goal itself, effective leaders strive to direct more of the firm's effort toward serving clients and delivering projects—in alignment with their vision and standards for the firm—and less into managing and administering the firm.

Successful firm leaders do not all share the same profile with respect to these characteristics. However, they do make sure that others in the firm have a strong sense of where the firm is going and what each individual can and should be doing to move it in that direction.

There are effective leaders who seem to develop many of these characteristics naturally, perhaps because leadership strengths are embedded in their DNA or because circumstances required that they rise to the occasion. No matter their genetic makeup, individuals with the desire to lead typically can develop the necessary characteristics through discipline and hard work. That being said, what can an aspiring design firm leader do to enhance the likelihood of success?

- Learn about the organization. Investigate why, and how, it does what it does, its culture, its strengths and shortcomings, its financial and business underpinnings, its processes for project delivery, and its reputation in the marketplace.
- Connect to people in many different areas of the firm. Learn who does what, how workgroups are organized, and the contribution that each person and group makes to the firm's overall success.
- Develop an external presence in the community and in the marketplace. Get involved and become visible in civic organizations, professional organizations, client organizations, and general business organizations.
- Maintain and demonstrate high personal and professional ethics.
- Speak out on relevant issues. Initiate dialogue on various operational and strategic topics. It's not always important to have the right answer. It is important to become recognized as someone who cares about the firm, as someone who thinks about topics important to the firm's future, and as someone who has the initiative, and courage, to step forward and tackle challenging issues.
- Above all, recognize that, by definition, leaders have followers. One measure of leadership success is fellowship success, and effective leaders make sure the people they lead are successful in their jobs.

In an architecture firm, the path to becoming an effective firm leader means striking a reasonable balance among roles and activities that sometimes conflict.

- Stay close enough to the work and the studio culture to maintain credibility with people in the firm, but be enough removed from day-to-day project work to think strategically about important aspects of the practice.
- Radiate passion for creative, technical, and service quality, but temper that passion with concern for the financial success of the firm.
- Engage in activities outside the firm to elevate the firm's position in the marketplace, but be operational enough to know where things stand in terms of technology, work quality, client satisfaction, finance, staffing, professional growth, and culture.
- Care deeply about the organization, those it serves, and those who do the serving, but be concerned about the learning and development needs of those who will rise to higher responsibility.
- Stay focused on specific priorities, but retain the capacity to juggle multiple and simultaneous priorities.
- Develop a reputation for hard work and dedication, but let the joy and passion of practice be evident to others.

Hugh Hochberg has consulted in practically all aspects of professional practice with over 700 design firms in his 32-year tenure as a partner in The Coxé Group, after earning a BArch degree from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute and an MBA from Harvard. He has lectured and taught about practice and leadership at institutions and organizations in the United States, Asia, and Australia.



Practice Management Digest

News & Best Practices from the PM Knowledge Community

Print this page | Email this page

Leading Your Profession

by Andrea Cohen Gehring, FAIA, LEED AP

One of the greatest advantages of leading our profession is that you are constantly gaining valuable knowledge and experience. By interacting with others and sharing information, you continue to learn new things and grow as a person and as a professional. As an added benefit, your presentation and speaking skills will improve substantially.

Becoming a respected leader in the design profession doesn't happen overnight. It takes a lot of hard work, commitment, and determination. I recommend that you focus on a specific area of the design profession where you have passion. That way, your inner leader will emerge a lot easier. Yes, you, too, can rise up and become a forceful leader in the profession!

Of course, a strong foundation upon which to build is useful also. Attending an excellent design school, having meaningful work experience, and gaining valuable tutelage from mentors who really care are the critical building blocks of this foundation. I was fortunate to have had all three. In general, becoming an effective leader in the profession happens in 3 phases.

Phase I: School Years

Your journey towards effective leadership begins during your formative school years. Some of you knew you wanted to be architects in high school, and aimed for well-regarded institutions of higher learning. Your leadership prowess may have begun during this time as a student body officer, yearbook editor, or sports team captain. Once in college, it took a lot just to get organized, whether you were commuting or living on campus. Many of you had to work while attending classes and completing grueling coursework and studio projects. Nevertheless, some of you may have been involved in campus organizations like the local American Institute of Architecture Students (AIAS) chapter, and began to bring your burgeoning leadership skills closer to the professional arena.

Phase II: Early Career

After graduating from college and joining the workforce, it is time to pay some dues and gain valuable experience. Yes, it seems like there's barely enough time to eat and sleep! You're working long hours, studying for and taking those licensing exams, and for some of you, even starting your families. It seems difficult, but during this time you need to plant your leadership seeds by getting involved in your local AIA chapter and/or other professional organizations. You may start out as a member at large, not necessarily serving on boards or committees. A good place to start is the AIA Young Architects Forum Advisory Committee, where you will interact with your peers nationwide. These are critical exploratory years, where you will begin developing your network and getting to know people outside the office at a professional level. Whatever you do, you need to find time to "just do it!"

Phase III: Established Professional

You've paid your dues, and now have begun to hit your stride! Your credentials are strong. You probably are a senior level project manager, designer, or perhaps a principal. You may even have started your own office. Your family may be well underway. You're flying high, and now you can really begin to make a difference! You may be on the board of your local AIA chapter, or actively engaged with AIA National-level committees. Or, you may have accepted leadership roles in philanthropic and charitable causes.

Finding the Time to Lead

No doubt, the critical challenge that we all face throughout our careers is: How do I juggle my professional leadership responsibilities with my ever-increasing

Winter 2009

In This Issue

Archive

- > [Winter Issue](#)
- > [Fall 2009](#)
- > [Summer 2009](#)
- > [Recession Issue](#)
- > [Spring 2009](#)
- > [Fall 2008](#)
- > [Summer 2008](#)
- > [Spring 2008](#)
- > [Fall 2007](#)
- > [Summer 2007](#)
- > [Spring 2007](#)
- > [Winter 2006](#)
- > [Fall 2006](#)
- > [Summer 2006](#)
- > [Winter 2005/2006](#)
- > [Summer 2005](#)
- > [Spring 2005](#)
- > [Winter 2004](#)
- > [Fall 2004](#)
- > [Summer 2004](#)
- > [Spring 2004](#)
- > [Winter 2004](#)
- > [October 2003](#)
- > [August 2003](#)

workload and family obligations? There really isn't a magic formula for discovering that perfect time management strategy. Simply put, you must accept the fact that leadership activities will take time. Committee meetings, workshops, lectures, events, and conventions will take up your evenings and even your weekends. But if you think of it as part of your being, as an aspect of your existence, then it becomes more than simply an "extracurricular" activity that you must squeeze in. Becoming an effective leader in the profession is really a state-of-mind. Treat it like brushing your teeth!

Leading with Passion

If you're involved in something that feeds your passion, your leadership activities will become something that you HAVE to do – not in terms of obligation, but rather in terms of personal desire. Think of the marathon runner who is passionate about fitness and absolutely MUST find time to run 5 miles every day. Become a leader in an arena of strong personal interest to you, whether it be design, sustainability, documentation, codes, or practice issues. Or, become a leader in the charitable cause that means something to you personally. Even if it's not related to design and construction, you will be admired by fellow volunteers as a leader who also is a design professional.

Effective Leadership

You have acknowledged the critical importance that leadership has to your career and to the profession, and have found the arena that stirs your passion. Now you need to become an effective leader – someone who can get things done. To do that, you must motivate your team of volunteers, all of whom have the same time constraints as you. Here are some general guidelines to help you lead effectively and achieve concrete results:

1. Take on only what you can handle. If you think you might be overwhelmed by the responsibilities of the leadership position that you're offered, volunteer for a smaller role.
2. Recruit well-organized multi-taskers who you know are able to juggle family and work obligations in addition to those of your committee or organization.
3. Convince your team that volunteering is a privilege, not a right, and that performance expectations are high. Ask them to be upfront and forthright about their abilities to devote the necessary time and energy to your committee.
4. Make clear-cut assignments, check-in frequently, and hold your team members accountable. If someone is having problems following through, have a discussion with that person and reiterate your performance expectations. Make adjustments to assignments if necessary. If lack of follow-through continues, ask him or her to leave your committee.
5. In meetings, conduct focused discussions that result in tangible, attainable action items. Avoid lofty ideas that may seem desirable but be impractical to execute.

As a leader, you provide a valuable service to the profession. You help to keep it vital by promoting interaction and the exchange of ideas. Equally important, you serve as a valuable example and mentor to young colleagues, providing them the critical building blocks necessary to their own leadership development.

Remember, you were mentored and given opportunities. Now it's time to give something back!

Andrea Cohen Gehring, FAIA, LEED® AP is the Design Partner at WWCOT, a 160-person, full-service architectural firm with offices in Santa Monica, Riverside, Palm Springs, and Modesto, California, and Shanghai, China. She served as the 2005 Chair of the AIA/National Practice Management Knowledge Community Advisory Group. Currently, Andrea serves as a Regent of the California Architectural Foundation and represents the School of Architecture as a member of the USC Alumni Association Board of Governors. She also has served on the AIA/Los Angeles Chapter Board of Directors.



Practice Management Digest

News & Best Practices from the PM Knowledge Community  Print this page |  Email this page

Leading Your Community

by Ambassador Richard N. Swett, FAIA

Mark Twain once wrote, "the man who does not read good books has no advantage over the man who cannot read them." I believe this view holds true in many other fields, as well. In particular, I also believe the architect who does not stand up as a leader in his or her community has no advantage over the person who cannot lead.

Great leadership -- the kind that inspires positive change, the kind that is inclusive and broadminded -- requires much more than a loud mouth and a set of strong and often narrow opinions. We see these traits frequently in today's political leaders, but this kind of leadership results only in an environment in which citizens feel disenfranchised and removed from meaningful participation in civic processes.

For decades, there has been a serious dearth of leadership in the profession of architecture. This leadership void within the profession should come as a surprise, given the fact that architects possess many traits required to provide integrating, inclusive leadership. Nevertheless, architects rarely, if ever, view themselves in the role of civic leaders. But now, more than ever, architects must move beyond this perspective and engage our communities in visible, effective roles.

We become community leaders simply by bringing a new perspective to our profession. We must take it upon ourselves to build relationships, more than just buildings. We must approach our designs with an attitude of advocacy for the communities in which they will be constructed. We must lead all stakeholders through a collaborative process that makes them a part of the optimal end result. We must bring together the public, elected officials, clients, and the design team through discussions on historical precedents and influences, design possibilities, local perspectives, and the development of strategic plans. The process of working with, and leading, the community in this manner breaks the pattern of passivity and disenfranchisement among community members.

Architects already possess the qualities and abilities that enable us to be leaders and bridge-builders among the various entities involved in creating the built environment. We must apply our leadership skills to the broader community and, by so doing, we can begin filling the great leadership void that exists in our communities.

Of course, architects also must not be afraid to step into leadership roles by assuming responsibilities outside of architecture, i.e. running for elected office. One of this country's most famous founding fathers -- our third president, Thomas Jefferson -- was an architect-statesman, and we can look to his example to inspire us to be greater leaders. Though we can certainly lead from our position as architects, we should also be willing to push our boundaries and take on leadership roles that are outside of our normal domain.

The first key for aspiring architect-leaders is to identify strong mentors and role-models. Ideally, try to find mentors who are already in the architecture profession, as they will have the greatest insight into this particular style of leadership. However, since such people are scarce, it's wise to find successful community leaders from any field and look to them for advice. The people already demonstrating success in community leadership should be the first source for information and inspiration. They can help architects new to the realm of community leadership to understand the unique challenges that come with this role.

Always remember that the various stakeholders who come together in the course of community leadership generally do so on volunteer time. This fact

Winter 2009

In This Issue

Archive

- > [Winter Issue](#)
- > [Fall 2009](#)
- > [Summer 2009](#)
- > [Recession Issue](#)
- > [Spring 2009](#)
- > [Fall 2008](#)
- > [Summer 2008](#)
- > [Spring 2008](#)
- > [Fall 2007](#)
- > [Summer 2007](#)
- > [Spring 2007](#)
- > [Winter 2006](#)
- > [Fall 2006](#)
- > [Summer 2006](#)
- > [Winter 2005/2006](#)
- > [Summer 2005](#)
- > [Spring 2005](#)
- > [Winter 2004](#)
- > [Fall 2004](#)
- > [Summer 2004](#)
- > [Spring 2004](#)
- > [Winter 2004](#)
- > [October 2003](#)
- > [August 2003](#)

makes it imperative for leaders to manage dissenting voices and opinions without offending or isolating. Poor relationship management will only disrupt community activity, rather than promote and advance it. In the world of architecture, a CEO of a firm can be dictatorial with employees, or a design team can be arrogant with a client, if they choose, and their work can still continue. But, an autocratic approach, while always unadvisable in the architecture profession, simply will not fly when it comes to community leadership.

Fortunately, most architects who have developed strong office and client relationships already possess the skills to be an effective community leader. The chance to use these skills in a sometimes strange and foreign – but ultimately very rewarding – sphere will benefit the architect by improving those skills manifold. Architects who serve as community leaders will further develop their skills as they provide service to the community. In other words, being community leaders will make architects better leaders within their own profession. Such experience also provides personal and professional recognition. What's more, while it sometimes comes with sharp criticism, the appreciation shown for community leaders can be tremendously rewarding.

If successful in the quest for elected office, architects' unique set of problem solving skills, creativity, and understanding of collaborative processes can truly make a difference in our communities and in larger society. By serving these communities we will be "doing well by doing good." To this end, architects no longer can afford to ignore our great potential for leadership anymore than we can afford to pass up the opportunity, as Mark Twain put it, to read a great book.

Ambassador Richard N. Swett, FAIA, is Vice President and Managing Principal of the Washington, D.C. office of international architecture, planning, engineering, interior design, and program management firm LEO A DALY. While a U.S. Representative for New Hampshire from 1991 to 1995, Swett served on the Congressional Committee on Public Works and Transportation, as well as its Aviation Subcommittee. He is a former U.S. Ambassador to Denmark and author of the book Leadership by Design: Creating an Architecture of Trust.



Practice Management Digest

News & Best Practices from the PM Knowledge Community



Print this page



Email this page

Letter from the Editor

PM Digest, Summer 2008

On a daily basis, in both our personal and professional lives, we as architects encounter situations that cry out for leadership. In some cases, we step up and provide that leadership ourselves. However, in too many cases, we either walk away or abstain. This behavior links quite directly to many of the professional and practice management issues about which we complain so frequently.

We hate that our clients dismiss our recommendations; we despise the struggles we face in getting our project teams to do what we want; we dread the decisions we must confront in managing our firms; we grumble persistently about the perceived ineffectiveness of our profession in addressing the issues we believe vital to our professional lives; we express disdain for the environmental decay and aesthetic wasteland so common in our urban areas. These complaints always seem to embrace the question, "Why don't THEY do something about this?" In reality, these are OUR problems and the solutions must come from US.

The Practice Management Knowledge Community dedicates this entire edition of Practice Management Digest to exploring the full range of leadership topics we confront in our daily lives. Those topics extend from an exploration of what it takes to lead yourself, through the dynamics of leading your client, to leading your project team, to leading your firm, to leading your profession, and finally to leading your community. In this series, we bring together a collection of outstanding professionals with recognized expertise in each of these areas. You will find their collective wisdom both motivational and useful to you in your lives.

As you read the articles that follow, I encourage you to think deeply about those aspects of your professional life that disturb you or which you believe warrant improvement. Then, think about what you are prepared to do, yourself, to help bring about the necessary changes.

Leadership is about vision, action and responsibility. What are *YOU* prepared to do?

Robert P. Smith, AIA, LEED AP, is President of C•M•M•I, Inc. in Atlanta, Georgia. Robert has served on National AIA committees dealing with sustainable design, integrated project delivery, and planning for the 14th edition of the Architect's Handbook of Professional Practice. A former chair of the Practice Management Knowledge Community, Robert has planned six national AIA conferences and presented at more than thirty industry events, including seven AIA National Conventions.

Winter 2009

In This Issue

Archive

- > Winter Issue
- > Fall 2009
- > Summer 2009
- > Recession Issue
- > Spring 2009
- > Fall 2008
- > Summer 2008
- > Spring 2008
- > Fall 2007
- > Summer 2007
- > Spring 2007
- > Winter 2006
- > Fall 2006
- > Summer 2006
- > Winter 2005/2006
- > Summer 2005
- > Spring 2005
- > Winter 2004
- > Fall 2004
- > Summer 2004
- > Spring 2004
- > Winter 2004
- > October 2003
- > August 2003