

Understanding Work Preferences of Emerging Professionals

Contributed by the AIA Knowledge Resources Staff

February 2008

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SUMMARY

AIA Technology in Architecture Practice and AIA Practice Management knowledge communities sponsored a conference, December 2–4, 2007, on the future of professional practice. At the conference Cara Bobchek and Barbara Irwin from HR Advisors Group LLC, a Washington, D.C.–based human resources (HR) consulting company with a focus on the architecture, engineering, and construction (AEC) industries, presented a seminar about managing emerging professionals. The seminar took an in-depth look at a recent survey HR Advisors Group LLC conducted about professionals with zero to seven years of experience in the industry. The survey returned results to help managers understand the concerns of this working age group.

THE SURVEY

The survey yielded 724 responses from 41 states. Survey respondents were 64 percent men, 84 percent under 30 years of age, and the majority had fewer than five years of experience in the industry. The survey detailed employee preferences across a number of topics, such as worker's priorities, preferred managerial style, concerns when accepting their current position, and concerns when looking for a new position. A few patterns emerged in the survey about what workers in this age group find important for an ideal work environment.

The survey is available for a fee at www.hradvisorsgroup.com. Overarching priorities of this working group were flexibility, regular feedback, potential for future opportunities, and open communication channels.

Flexibility. Respondents indicated some form of flexibility was important to them. The respondents appreciate flexible working hours or work options. It is important for them to create a work/life balance through alternative work schedules; most importantly respondents preferred some type of work schedule option.

Feedback. Younger generations prefer a lot of feedback. An annual performance review is not

enough. That is not to say this working age group requires weekly validation in order to perform their job but it is important to them to know how they are performing in relation to expectations on a regular basis.

Future opportunities. When respondents were asked what criteria will be important to them when looking for future employment, they cited the potential for future opportunities as very important.

Communication. Communicate with your staff early and often. Younger professionals surround themselves with technology and information and are accustomed to getting information at the drop of a hat. The information does not have to include current profit and loss numbers, but may include general financial performance indicators and client data, such as work on-hand data or firm performance against internal metrics.

IMPLEMENT RETENTION PROGRAMS

One retention method is to involve younger employees in the recruiting process by offering finder bonuses or including them in interviews. It is worthwhile for young professionals to sit in on interviews to learn more about internal firm processes.

One key element to learn from this working group is that *little things go a long way*. Each of the preferences when listed in succession may start to make this group seem needy; however, that isn't the case. This working age group is competent and happy to be a part of the design profession, but in general they may be happier on a day-to-day basis if some of their work style preferences are fulfilled.

The discussion of the tethered millennials is tied to the concurrent discussion of the leadership strain. As baby boomers start to retire, firms are looking at the management potential of less experienced professionals, and in some cases are coming up empty-handed. Therefore, it is important to retain qualified individuals and foster an environment where employees are invested in the company and want to grow into leadership positions.

About the Presenters

Barbara H. Irwin is the founder and principal of HR Advisors Group LLC and leads the organization with more than 20 years of experience in the field of HR management and organizational development. Prior to forming HR Advisors Group, Irwin held various executive-level HR positions in the engineering and architecture industries, including vice president at Montgomery Watson Harza and corporate director of HR at Dewberry.

Cara Bobchek is a management consultant with 25 years of experience in research, strategic planning, and communications, exclusively in the AEC industries. She spent 10 years with an *Engineering News-Record* top 50-ranked engineering/architecture firm, where she was business development group manager and senior writer/editor for the 1,600-person firm.

Key Terms

- Practice
- Employment
- Professional development
- Training
- Emerging professionals

This Best Practice was produced in connection with the AIA's Knowledge Communities. For more information, go to www.aia.org/nav_kc.



RESOURCES

For More Information on This Topic

See also "Recruiting and Hiring," by Laurie Dreyer-Hadley and Kathleen C. Maurel, Assoc. AIA, *The Architect's Handbook of Professional Practice*, 13th edition, Chapter 9, page 229. *The Handbook* can be ordered from the AIA Bookstore by calling 800-242-3837 (option 4) or sending an e-mail to bookstore@aia.org.



More Best Practices

The following AIA Best Practices provide additional information related to this topic:

- 09.02.07 How the Talent Strain Affects Architecture Firms
- 09.03.32 Mentoring Interns: A Firm Commitment
- 09.03.30 Laddership: Integrating Leadership and Mentoring

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