

Fostering Growth at JG Johnson Architects

Contributed by JG Johnson Architects. Excerpted and adapted from a 2008 IDP Outstanding Firm award-winning entry. May 2008

The AIA collects and disseminates Best Practices as a service to AIA members without endorsement or recommendation. Appropriate use of the information provided is the responsibility of the reader.

SUMMARY

Denver-based JG Johnson Architects (JGJA) received a 2008 IDP Outstanding Firm Award. The award recognizes the firm's commitment to leadership development and a structured learning opportunities program.

IN-HOUSE UNIVERSITY

JGJA utilizes a university framework to manage training courses for emerging professionals. The university format helps the firm implement different teaching techniques and styles that include all staff members in learning opportunities. Junior and senior level managers teach the in-house classes. Often interns will help managers teach courses, this introduces interns to staff training techniques and furthers their awareness of project management styles.

As part of the university, all learning opportunities are posted on a firm-wide calendar. The firm pays \$150 per person for outside activities like lectures, tours, or conferences.

JGJA organizes Learning Opportunities in a Voluntary environment (LOVE) lunch sessions. The firm also organizes site visits and classes on topics such as

- Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design® (LEED) certification
- Building codes
- Technical drawing technique
- Construction methods

Staff members are introduced to the university structure during new hire training. Recently-hired staff members are invited to participate in a one-week intensive training session to learn about office practices, CAD standards, office culture, among other firm specific topics.

LEADERSHIP TRAINING FOR EXPERIENCED INTERNS

JGJA is in the process of transferring ownership; to help this transition the firm hired a leadership coach a few years ago. At first, the leadership coach only worked with principals and senior managers but more recently project managers and associates have started to work with the coach.

At \$225 per hour, the monthly sessions accumulate significant cost but the firm believes in fostering growth and training everyone how-to become better leaders. Staff members participating in the program meet as a group once a month for an hour and a half and meet with the coach individually four times a year.

Often staff training programs at architecture firms rely on technical and practice-based topics. JGJA has a successful professional development program because it pushes the limits of a typical program and teaches staff members about practice management, leadership, and business issues. This provides career advancement opportunities while helping interns fulfill necessary IDP hours.

Implementing a successful leadership development program requires dedication. JGJA has made the time, resources, and financial commitment to accelerate leadership development opportunities for interns.

RESOURCES

For More Information on This Topic

See also "Developing Leadership Skills" by William C. Ronco, Ph.D., and Mark Jussaume, PE, in *The Architect's Handbook of Professional Practice*, 14th edition, Chapter 7, page 293. *The Handbook* can be ordered from the AIA Bookstore by calling 800-242-3837 (option 4) or by sending an e-mail to bookstore@aia.org.



More Best Practices

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

- 09.03.37 Carrier Johnson: A Commitment to IDP
- 09.03.36 NBBJ: Success in Leadership Development
- 09.03.29 Development of an In-house University

Feedback

The AIA welcomes member feedback on Best Practice articles. To provide feedback on this article, please contact bestpractices@aia.org.

Key Terms

- Practice
- Employment
- Staff Development
- Leadership