

Growing Well-Rounded Young Architects

Contributed by SH Architecture, recipient of the 2007 IDP Outstanding Firm Award

February 2007

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SUMMARY

SH Architecture, like many busy firms, must be careful to make sure that deadlines don't overpower the goal of growing well-rounded young architects. One of the ways the firm does this is to establish a whole-project team. This shows interns that SH Architecture values an intern's contribution. When a new project is awarded, at least one intern will be on the project team from the beginning. Throughout the project's progress, interns continue to take on additional responsibilities, such as consultant contact and coordinating parts of document production.

SH Architecture, located in Las Vegas, was a finalist for the 2007 IDP Outstanding Firm Award. The firm employs 36 staff and has a sustainability focus.

MENTORING/IDP ADVISORY SYSTEM

SH Architecture has policies and practices in place for the education and professional development of young architects and designers. Each IDP candidate is assigned a supervisor within the firm with whom they review IDP requirements and progress on a monthly basis. Although each IDP candidate is encouraged to find a mentor that they can speak to and have a collaborative relationship with, many choose to use the CEO of the firm. Meetings are held with the mentor as often as necessary, but never more infrequently than quarterly.

Each intern's formal quarterly performance review includes a discussion of professional and personal goals. We expect interns to strive for architectural licensure; therefore, IDP progress is followed closely as a means of evaluating an employee's performance. While sluggish pursuit of IDP completion isn't grounds for dismissal, it is a signal that we need to talk about how to better match an intern's work experience to his or her goals.

IDP IMPLEMENTATION

The IDP policy and practices are implemented from the employee's first day of employment at SH Architecture. There is no waiting for a probationary period to begin tracking and recording the IDP process. Employees are encouraged to use the spreadsheet log provided by NCARB to track their monthly progress and report to their supervisor.

These reports are an integral part of the firm's culture of performance as each candidate is expected to progress toward licensure and is required to report on this progress. Proper tracking of hours allows plans to be made to include the candidate in necessary meetings and processes that will fulfill requirements.

We recognize that some IDP categories are more difficult to fulfill than others. For example, we do not write specifications daily. To accommodate interns who are trying to accumulate credit in Specifications and Materials Research, we have established two continuous means of becoming familiar with specifications. First, because SH Architecture is dedicated to sustainable architecture, we are constantly updating our product libraries, performance specs, and general conditions. This constant improvement of the SH Green Spec gives interns a chance to become familiar with our spec writing program. Another means of giving interns specifications experience is through SH University, which offers classes on BSD SpecLink and on how to apply our stringent SH Sustainable Standards to all phases of design and construction.

The IDP process also allows the candidates to be exposed to areas of the practice that may be somewhat beyond their current level of understanding, but still offer growth. SH Architecture believes that IDP candidates should be allowed to grow by being challenged; however, internal checks and balances avoid unnecessary failures. We believe that no candidate has ever grown into a capable architect by constantly doing what is comfortable and easily discerned; therefore, we seek opportunities for growth for all of our IDP candidates.

SUPPLEMENTARY EDUCATION

Something that truly distinguishes SH Architecture as a very special place to work is SH University. The word *university* has Latin origins meaning a "community of master and scholars." At SH Architecture, we have established a university-style system for training our staff. We asked "masters and scholars" from our office to share their special expertise in a classroom setting.

To create a well-rounded employee, we established several “colleges”: The College of Design, College of Sustainability, College of Operations, and the College of Administration. The College of Design helps ensure consistent presentation of SH Architecture in all aspects of the verbal, written, and nonverbal communications in all areas of the firm. The College of Design promotes the expression of the SH Design Philosophy, which is to unleash the power of design in every aspect of our business.

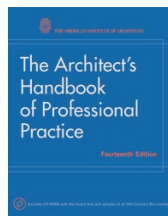
The College of Sustainability helps teach our employees to change the perceptions of the marketplace through our people, processes, and products by applying a triple bottom-line approach that considers the social, economic, and environmental impacts of everything we do. The College of Operations ensures a smooth delivery system to our client by educating employees with the most current building codes as well as city and state building regulations. It also keeps employees up-to-date on the latest software in the architectural industry. The College of Administration educates employees about administration, human resources, and marketing and public relations.

Another remarkable feature of SH Architecture’s educational efforts is the number of employees who participate in professional organizations and community groups. The firm generously pays for membership in professional organizations and often contributes time and money to the many community groups with which its employees are involved.

RESOURCES

For More Information on This Topic

See “Staff Development and Retention,” by Laurie Dreyer-Hadley, Kathleen C. Maurel, Assoc. AIA, and Debra Fiori, in *The Architect’s Handbook of Professional Practice*, 14th edition, page 285. 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:

- 09.03.32 Fostering Talent in an Architecture Firm
- 09.03.39 Producing the Next Generation of Architects
- 09.03.42 Expanding the Exploration of Design

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
- Intern Development Program
- Professional development
- Mentor
- Supervising