



AIA Detroit

A Chapter of the American
Institute of Architects

AIA Detroit Christopher Kelley Leadership Development Program 2017-2018 Cohort

Session 3: Entrepreneurship and Business Management

Date: December 1st, 2017

Venue: TechTown Detroit

Scholars: Kevin Gurtowsky, AIA & Shanita Rutland, NOMA

The focus of Session #3 was on Entrepreneurship and Business Management, the multiple speakers and question and answer sessions struck a balance between the passion and innovation behind entrepreneurship in addition to the everyday logistics of running and maintaining a business practice. The session was hosted at Tech Town Detroit, a local small business incubator and accelerator. The building houses co-working, meeting and event spaces in addition to classes on business development.



The session began with brief presentations from a range of successful entrepreneur based architecture / design businesses within the Metro Detroit Region.

Including:

- 5/8ths Architecture – a design / build firm
- Brian DuBois Atelier – a furniture fabricator / designer
- Centric Design Studio – adaptive re-use architecture practice
- Thomas Roberts Architect – historic preservation architecture practice
- Synecdoche Design Studio – a design / make architecture firm
- Zoyes Creative Group – a dual sided group
 - Model focused
 - Creative marketing / branding / digital / web

The group then split up and had a brief round table discussions, which allowed for engaging and pointed questions by the cohort on a variety of business related questions. Discussions were candid and honest, including information on how businesses were started, difficulties and lessons



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learned, methods used for finding job opportunities and networking, and how to balance income with desired project work.



The next session featured Nicole Farmer, founder of Lifeline Business Consulting. Nicole led the group through the process of developing a business idea - through passion, strengths and interests, then moving onto the necessary next steps to turn the dream into a reality. She began with asking the cohort the definition of an entrepreneur. A range of ideas and

skills required were generated, including: visionary, fearless and one who establishes their own path. Nicole also offered up the term “intra-preneur”, as someone that brings their skills and ideas to an existing business, as opposed to starting out on their own. Key strategies to developing and starting your own business were reviewed. Research is necessary both on target markets as well as competitors, which can help better define a strategic business plan and vision. Nicole also covered multiple funding resources that are available to help get small businesses started, in addition to filing for the legal structures that will work best for each individual business.





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The final session was a conversation on the practice of architecture, within the Detroit metro region, and how design through different avenues can begin to effectively generate an impact. The conversation included Abir Ali with Platform Detroit and Brian Hurttienne, Principal of Christian Hurttienne Architects. Both panelists gave presentations on their past work and career trajectories, in addition to current development based projects in the city. They offered advice on lessons learned on starting and growing a business: to seek balance and expertise from others, whether through business partners or consultants. Also to be open to all projects and opportunities at the start of a business, and to use each project to hone or develop a particular skill set and develop your portfolio, even if it isn't the ideal project. Other advice included: don't work for free, do your taxes, and while the client comes first be sure to maintain your values. The group also discussed how architects could begin to play a larger role in decision and policy making, at a local level. Recommendations included volunteering for local boards on topics of interest to begin to know how decisions are being made and to find ways to be effective through direct contribution.