



# AIA Detroit

A Chapter of the American  
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## AIA Detroit Christopher Kelley Leadership Development Program 2018-2019 Cohort

### Session 2: Entrepreneurship & Management

**Date: November 2, 2018**

**Venue: Hunt Street Station, 2200 Hunt Street , Detroit MI 482017**

**Scholars: Samantha Szeszulski and Bryan Seef**

### Presentation #1 – Managing an Architecture Firm

**By Chris Mackey, AIA, LEED AP, NCARB & Beth Yorke, AIA, of Stantec**

Chris Mackey's and Beth Yorke's presentation dealt with the principles of managing an architectural firm, including the following topics:

Hiring and Retention – The firm's strategic goals should drive the hiring decisions.

- Why are we hiring?
- Who do we want to be?
- Who has the right experience?
- When is the right time to fire them?
- Do we have the appropriate workload?

This is the synergy (or synergies) of making a successful firm. There is no singular answer.



Staff Balance – Office Staffing is no longer a pyramid. The number of mid level employees in the workforce have grown. They understand the computer programs being used and understand how a building goes together. The average 'mid level employee' has 5-15 years of experience. In a small firm, a team member can experience a wide range of responsibilities and must be flexible. In a larger firm, people are more specialized.

Recruitment – It is important to network so can meet new people, so that you're able to find the right people to fill a position. This is for both experienced hires and intern/ entry level hires just out of school. Sometimes it's more about the person as a strategic hire than hiring based on workload.



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Professional Development – Diversity is needed in professional development. It is key to advocate for yourself. Companies must invest in the training of their employees.. Both external and internal training, as well as mentoring are required to keep the office engaged, and thinking ahead.

Succession Planning – Firms that are continuously successful have a succession plan to determine who will be replacing leadership as people retire. It's important to have a plan in place if something sudden were to require a position to be filled, but also to plan long term for a replacement up to 5-10 years out. Regular career development of employees allows the team to see who is ready for leadership. A employee must have the desire and the ability to lead. They also must have the criteria to lead and make sure that the worker meets those criteria. “Measures of Success” – set number of goals should be achieved before going into a new leadership position. Personality is also a factor.

Team Dynamics – A good team needs good communication. Collaboration is key to achieving the team’s goals. Adversarial relationships hinder performance and team efficiency. It is best to be aware of each other’s roles and help out when needed.

Work/ Life Balance – People can have a different versions of work/life balance. It can be flex time, work from home, part time, etc. This must be communicated early on.

Culture – Firm Leadership is the culture. What are we aspiring to be? If we’re not achieving it, why not? Talk to individuals, form a committee. Track where you are in the aspirations/ where you want to be. Helzerberg (business management) stated the reason people leave is due to firm culture.

Staffing – Architecture is a cyclical business. The movement (schedule) of the different projects is not a straight line. A firm must try to keep people working through the waves of projects ending and beginning. A variety of projects is required to achieve this. The best way to make this happen is to have a Forecasting and Budget. There are a few programs that help with this – Delteck and Analyzer, also Orakc. Must make sure that the design portion of a project does not cut into the project budget. Also people must be aware of scope creep.

Forecasting – Workload vs Staff vs Backlog vs Probability of a project/ projects. Forecasting involves all of these things along with the profit margin on a project. It helps to make sure the office staffed well with the right people.

In summation: Hire People, Keep People, Staff People, Do Good Work, Make a Profit, Repeat.



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## Presentation #2: Starting your own Firm

**By Erin Bonahoom, Canvas Legal, PLC and Amy Swift  
CEO of Building Hugger**

If you don't have a customer, you don't have a business. You must first figure out:

- What is it that you want to provide?
- Who is your target market?
- Where is your target market?
- Where do they network? Where can you meet them?
- What type, size, location of project?
- What would you like to solve?
- What is the problem your client has?

Figuring out these questions will help determine what type of firm you want to be. It is figuring out your passion, setting goals, and then applying it. Then, how do you develop that? Make it unique. What are you offering? What are the tangible elements of your firm?

Smaller firms do have a different type of relationship with clients that can be seen as an asset. But you cannot forget to create professional boundaries



Figure out the competition: who works in your area and your building type? What do they do? How do they do the things they do? Find this out so you can make yourself stand out. Also, it can help you streamline your workforce and make you more efficient by using others examples. There will be a lot of immediate steps that could be discouraging.

You are the Conductor to your orchestra. Know your network so when you need to, you can sub someone in to get the job done. You will need to develop a consultant and sub consultant database.

Don't skimp on the legal services and hire a good lawyer. Always start with a great contract. AIA standard contracts are good but you will need to add on or modify for each job.

You must be realistic about overhead and startup costs (create a business plan). You may have to



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have other ways to bring in revenue. There may be times where you must be flexible, creative and diverse in how you make a profit.

LLC – Limited Liability Corporation. It is important to start this early on, before you even start business. You can start an LLC before you start ‘real’ business and begin acquiring credit so that your credit score is established when you need to ask a bank for a loan. A baseline financial strategy will need to be developed, assess the risk.

L3C – is a small business that can receive money from a foundation. Allowed in Michigan but not recognized by the IRS so there can be some issues on a federal level. The IRS requires it to be ‘fiduciary’



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## Panel Discussion #1: Starting your own Firm/ Business

**By: Brian Hurttienne, AIA, LEED AP of Christian Hurttienne Architects,  
Chandra Moore, AIA, LEED AP of coG- studio LLC  
Amy Swift of Building Hugger  
Kaija Wuollet of of Laavu**



When starting your business you must develop and express your strengths. You must remember that you do not need to do everything. You also must realize that there will be failures. This allows for reflection and new developments of a niche and the ability to reassess your clients and services. The most important items it is have a mission. And to give time to reflect on your work and where you are going.

The reason for starting a business could be a personal need, to generate income, flexibility, develop your passion. If you form a partnership, make sure it is with someone you can work well with and you both complement each other's skill set.

Everyone starts up there business differently. There is not one right way or path. The main crucial resource for starting up is your own business is personal knowledge and passion. Other critical resources include:

- Network
- Reputation
- Cashflow
- Creative business solutions and models



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It is good to stay involved and continue networking for new clients and for possible employees. Staying involved will also help develop inspiration.

Capital and cash flow are very important. It is best to assess ways to raise capital through different financial resources whether it is a lien, grant or loan. A plan must be created to regulate and predict cash flow. A list of what is wanted versus what is needed should also be created to prioritize where the money goes. This can then lead into creating business solutions and models.

Always remember that not every job is for you and there may be some jobs to which you need to say no. Make it up with good networking and involvement with local organizations. Also, continue to build strong relationships with clients so that they will refer you to new clients.

Some things you must always consider and continue to reflect on:

People: Love the people you work with

Work: Love the work you do

Market/ Mission Development: Do you want to be in this market? Does it follow your beliefs?

Profit: Are you financially solvent?

It is beneficial to market yourself, promote your work, and promote balance.

One important thing to do is to test or explore before starting a business. Begin with noting what you like or dislike about your current position or previous employment. Adjust your passions to meet what type of business you want to do, or adjust the business to your passion. While as an employee, remember to align and apply your interests with others with the firm's you work with. How can you progress? Who do you work well with? It might be good to bring others with the same interest and who you work well with, with you when starting a business.

Gather ideas from other industries to help come up with creative strategies for starting up –whether it is in the business plan, or marketing, or tech related.

## **Panel Discussion #2: Intrapreneurship & Leveraging Resources**



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**By: Carl Bolofer, NOMA of Rouge HAA**  
**Reverend Faith Fowler of Cass Community Social Services**  
**Maria Kook, AIA, LEED AP of Citizen HKS**  
**Steve Vogel, FAIA, of Detroit Collaborative Design Center, UDM**



## Rogue HAA – Carl Bolofer, NOMA

- Research design topics,
- Competitions
- Advocate for design in the community
- Help out local universities / college
- Will bring in professors and other designers to talk about design.
- Not a lot of risk; volunteering time

## Cass Community Social Services & Tiny Homes – Reverend Faith Fowler

- Organization that has been involved in the community since the depression
- 7,000 volunteers
- Help find homes, food, jobs, etc
- Started tiny homes in Detroit.
- Created a business plan and followed a process

## Citizen HKS – Maria Kook, AIA, LEED AP

- Month of service – employees are given time to volunteer their services
- Create fundraising for non-profit projects (and are treated no different than profit jobs. Must stay in a budget
- problem space program
- Recognition and promotion internally. Get the staff excited and want to work on it.
- Research Monitoring – go back and see how well it is working over a period of time.



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- Bring in the benefit for the firm through research and better design

## DCDC – Detroit Design Collaboration at University of Detroit Mercy. Stephen Vogel, FAIA

- Start with \$250,000.
- Design consulting for nonprofit. Will only take projects that are non-profit or government so that will not compete with the profession outside of the academic realm.
- Full time staff of 10 people
- It is now 25 years old.
- Teaching 'hospitality'
- Helps writing proposals for community organizations, gets project and funding, and then gets paid.

The panel spoke about the skills professionals can use to help the community through volunteering and how it can impact the firm. First an idea has to be created of how everyone will help the community. This idea needs to be developed with a group or team who will participate.

One important part is to treat the volunteering just like a regular project: to have a mission, a problem with solution; a business plan; budget; deadlines and schedule. However, it can be taken further than a regular project through research and through the creative process that could be used on other projects.

Passion will facilitate the process/progress, and help the group maintain and achieve their goals. This will then extend out in the firm and inspire others internally.

More firms are doing more research. They are allowing universities to do complete their research and allowing it to be shared on BRICK or through the AIA Intersections Symposium at the AIA National Convention. Topics can range from helping the environment to creating social change.