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Candidate for Treasurer

1. Positioning the Profession for the Future

The impact and duration of the economic downturn has impacted the design and construction industry in ways we are just starting to realize. While by all accounts the tide has turned, the architectural profession has yet to fully recover. Firms that have “survived” the recession are now looking ahead toward a very different future, one where they will potentially have to change their business practices, and refocus their energies to be successful in a new economy. At all levels, how can the AIA support members to network and pursue opportunities in a recovering market?

In addition to the extensive support that AIA currently provides, we need to focus on a longer term solution. We must reposition the profession of architecture for the future. We can dramatically expand the scope, volume and impact of our work and we can do it now, essentially immediately.

Architects are the natural leaders of projects. Our talents, training, capacities, orientation and insight and our position as consultants and advisors to our clients all combine to make architects the natural leaders; but the profession needs leadership from AIA to encourage us to leave our comfort zone and to learn to collaborate with and lead the rest of our design and construction “industry”.

We must take back our profession by assuming responsibility for (and control of) the comprehensive management of projects in all phases of the project’s life; of project scoping, budgeting, planning, scheduling, estimating, hazardous materials, surveying, geotechnical investigations, permitting, grantsmanship and all the other facets that we are equipped to do or oversee. (The same way we manage the effort of a design team of disciplinary specialists.)

“Program Managers” as an example, only exist because they fill the vacuum that we leave when our clients look to us for these functions and we step back and say “Oh, we don’t do that”. We have voluntarily marginalized ourselves and we must reverse that process by leaving the sanctuary of our silo where we hide from (largely imagined) risk. Our clients are looking for complete guidance on projects, for direct single source access to the breadth of our industry, for comprehensive, coordinated management of their projects.

We have a choice; we can assume our natural position as leaders or we can play a more conscripted role as followers. AIA can and should provide the leadership to facilitate that change thru the knowledge communities (particularly the Center for Integrated Practice), the website, the contract documents, and continuing education programs at all levels.

2. Repositioning the AIA for the Future

The success of the Repositioning requires our collective energy to shift our perspective about what the AIA can do to serve members, advance the profession, and provides a tremendous opportunity for change. If you could make only one change to the AIA as part of the Repositioning Initiative, what would that be? Please be specific in the details and explanation of why.
There is one change that I think will transcend all the aspects and potential benefits of repositioning and I believe that change is already underway. If nothing else, I am confident that the very process of repositioning will engender an ongoing culture of communication throughout the Institute. People who I have been talking with in recent weeks truly believe that their opinion is valued and is being sought, that they are being listened to and that it is important that they participate, that together we can affect meaningful change.

Carried to its logical conclusion, this can mean that we will develop a structure for more effectively sharing information and ideas not only between national, regions, states and local components, but chapter to chapter around the country (and the world). Better, more open communication will result in greater trust and enable us to work cooperatively on problems that we share.

I believe this clarity and openness of communication is particularly important when discussing financial issues like resource sharing and member value. While running for treasurer I have consistently heard questions about the cost of membership coupled with the same recurring question; “Where does the money go?”, I think not so much in protest as in a genuine desire to understand how funds are used, and to be assured that the money is well spent. I like to think that as treasurer, I will be able to provide the clarity of information that will answer that question and satisfy our members’ concern.

3. Member Resources
While the economic climate has been challenging for all in the design and construction industry, it has been especially difficult for “seasoned” professionals who are often times unable to compete in today’s technology-based delivery environment. How is the AIA positioned to support these experienced members?

The AIA can support these experienced members by helping us realize that we have always been coordinators and leaders of teams with diverse talents, including consultants of every stripe, administrative personnel, architectural technicians.

We “seasoned professionals” have spent a lifetime learning how to design, build, manage projects, run a business. Now, we must learn to collaborate with our young professionals who have spent their young lifetimes learning the technology that has suddenly become available to us all. Personally, I do not see the potential or need to develop comparable skills myself but I have learned to collaborate with them to bring their skills to the team, (and in doing so to enjoy the privileges of mentoring and reverse mentoring).

The partners in our office take great delight in the application of the powerful tools that these young people bring to our practice; in design, in production and in marketing with the use of social media as we share with them the lessons we have learned over our careers.

4. Organizational Structure
While all can agree that a revitalized, relevant, and robust AIA to lead and support the profession is critical, there is still uncertainty whether the AIA has the will to make the significant and substantive changes necessary. In view of the findings of the Repositioning Study, what recommendations would you make about the AIA’s current service and delivery model to the membership?
I do not think there is uncertainty as to whether the AIA has the will to make the changes necessary. When we turned the pyramid upside down, we empowered almost 80,000 advocates who will accept nothing less. The will is most certainly there. Our collective task now is to listen and to synthesize, to hear our members’ proposals and to construct a balanced response.

As I have talked with members around the country during recent weeks, I have come to believe there is a wealth of ideas and information available within the organization. We need to share these resources with each other. Our challenge is to establish a process or system for this sharing.

For a start, the model for delivery of services needs coordination to reduce duplication of efforts and to have each level of the organization do what it is best equipped or positioned to do. Members, for many functions, relate to the institute most readily thru their local components and we should provide national’s support and empowerment of that relationship, facilitating sharing between components of templates or toolkits for successful ideas and programs. It may be appropriate to think of the chapters as the organization’s neighborhood retail stores and National as a resource center, clearinghouse, and repository of information for members and components. To make this work for everyone we must also find a way to support the unstaffed chapters, perhaps with some manner of staff sharing program.

5. Emerging Professionals
Across all levels of the organization members lament the lack of engagement of emerging professionals both in practice and within the AIA. The decline of a culture of mentoring within firms and the profession is blamed for the correspondingly low numbers of new licensees. What can the AIA do to affect a cultural shift to among experienced professionals and encourage all involved in the delivery of architectural services to stay connected with the organization?

I believe our young professionals are incredibly engaged in their profession and in service to society, but there is an unfortunate disconnect that results from a lack of commitment between many of our firms and their younger staff.

Some of our firms do invest in their young employees and nurture their futures. Too many firms do not see the potential reward in investing in their younger staff, thinking they are likely to move from firm to firm. Correspondingly, people are not committed to firms because they do not see the opportunity to grow there or a commitment to them on the part of the firm when times are lean. This situation can be corrected by the firms and AIA needs to work at helping our firms to recognize this paradox and institute better retention policies (for both self serving and ethical reasons).

I do think, however, that we (AIA) have already actually done a great deal to step into the mentoring vacuum and that this has been a primary reason when we have been successful in engaging EPs. Many of our chapters are primary sources for ARE training, continuing education, leadership training and collegiality for emerging professionals.

We owe it to the profession and to our young professionals to continue to develop this support structure. AIA at the national level must respond by developing the capacity to become a responsive center for, provide a forum for, and be a clearinghouse for information to help the chapters share that capacity to be a focal point for an emerging professionals culture.