1. 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 the AIA could make only one change as part of the Repositioning Initiative, what would that be?** Please be specific in the details and explanation of why.

I assume this question is asking which of the ten Repositioning issues I would select as the dominant and important change needed in order to create the most benefit to our members. As a Vice President I have led group discussions with many different audiences and have asked a similar question…which is most important? What should be our priorities?

The answers vary. They depend on every person’s experience and what they consider their biggest sore spot. And the solutions they like are often what someone else should do. And all manner of ideas and actions are being touted as a repositioning initiative. Not all of them are.

We have accepted the ten major items in four categories as a result of the most comprehensive survey of our members, our clients, and the public that has ever been done. These items are valid and all are important. They make sense to me. But we will return to business as usual if we don’t continually ask ourselves what we are doing to shift from what exists to where we need to be. In every category. Continuously. Most are not simple check list items.

My approach is “all of the above”. We ought to ask ourselves as leaders in everything we do how we should modify our work to respond to our Repositioning recommendations. The answers will be unique based on what we are doing. For example, as Chair of the Board Knowledge Committee I asked our team to see everything we chose to do through the lens of these priorities. Some didn’t apply. Many do, such as engagement of emerging professionals and coordination between components and Knowledge Communities and National AIA. At every level of leadership in everything we take on we should compare our traditional response to “the list”. And then act differently. Then we will have the culture change that has real value to our members.

2. ADVOCATING FOR ENERGY, WATER AND RESOURCE EFFICIENT DESIGN

The marketplace is demanding sustainable design principles be incorporated into projects. While adoption of the International Green Construction Code is changing how architects are including sustainable products and efficient systems, incorporating sustainability as a core design principle into the culture of architectural practice has been more challenging and many practitioners are relying on external consultants to help them achieve green requirements. **How can the AIA leverage existing programs and activities to help the firms mainstream the principles of green design, and advance ownership of sustainability by the profession from a client and community perspective?**

I’m glad you asked this question. I was on the core AIA team that brought the IgCC through five weeks of sessions to write the code, scores of conference calls, and three public hearings. At the final adoption hearings I delivered the keynote address for the AIA as the cosponsor. Subsequently I led the preparation of the first AIA national budget for our response to this opportunity which became the Task Force committees on education, advocacy, code development, energy modeling, and contract documents. I have
spoken in over a dozen states plus a broadly viewed webcast on the future of this challenge and opportunity. For the most part architects have been less interested in the metrics but in how to integrate the requirements into their design process, how to manage their clients’ expectations and limit unreasonable liability, and how to get compensated for their additional responsibility.

First, our members understand the value and imperative of using fewer resources to build and operate buildings. The environmental scan by Mary Ann Lazarus has clarified our near term priorities as energy, resources, design and health, and resiliency. Our members tell us that these are the priorities for which we should take leadership. In my area of current responsibility we are cascading this lens through our Knowledge Communities so they can reflect these values in their examples of best practices, awards, and teaching.

I think our near term actions should include the following:

1. We must help our members by educating them on compliance and design strategies to maximize their ability to get reliable results with reasonable effort. For example, the existing energy modeling programs do not readily overlay with our design process and software. Research and development is needed.
2. The AIA Sustainability Guide was a great start, but we need a refresher version taught on a larger scale.
3. We must collaborate with others to be successful. As those familiar with the IgCC know, architects can and should work with our alliances including building and code officials to further develop the overall code, now migrating into the IBC. If we want ownership over the process we must lead this collaboration. This includes working with governmental agencies at every level. If we don’t do it, others will set the table.

In the final adoption hearings for the IgCC we won an extremely close vote to permit architects to control the commissioning process. A very large number of code officials voting felt that architects weren’t up to the job and wanted this task relegated to a third party over which we had no authority. By a handful of votes we won the right to hire consultants or perform the work ourselves.

Earlier this month I gave the Commencement Address for all of Auburn University, the first architect ever to do so. My thesis included “leaving the planet better off than you found it”. If we take similar opportunities for leadership and civic engagement, our clients and the public will respect us all the more for it. We must learn and we must engage.

3. Resourcing Firms for Practice and Prosperity
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. This will require a cultural “shift” of the AIA to resource firms and actively increase the prosperity of the profession. How can the AIA become an active participant in cultivating and advancing innovation in design and project delivery?

My privilege these past two years has been to serve as Chair of the AIA Knowledge Committee. One of our tasks is to support the creation and sharing of knowledge. I have listened in on scores of conference calls of our Knowledge Communities numbering today almost two dozen areas of project type or practice interest areas. All of them are led by incredibly smart and motivated volunteer architect leaders. They are creating enormously valuable intellectual property for use by our members. Our job is to enable them to maximize their goals and to facilitate our members’ access to this resource.
Right now we are in a robust effort to determine how to extract and highlight what our members believe are best practices in practice and make them more accessible. I am confident our KC leaders will adjust their own offerings as well to target this need. We need to help them rather than add work. Over half of our members belong to at least one KC. I predict more will see the increased value and sign on. Also, we have to determine where the gaps are to fill. The Small Firm Roundtable’s work right now is an outstanding example of focusing on the right tools to help members. Enabling members to be their best is my goal.

Also, our educational offerings at convention now are required to provide the “latest and best” to our members to be in front of the curve. We have raised the bar because it is the top priority of our members.

4. IMPROVING THE AIA ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE
The existing AIA organizational structure is inefficient and has greatly affected the viability of local AIA components. As a fundamental tenet of the Repositioning Initiative, as a leader, how would you suggest the AIA renew its efforts to empower, resource, and enable components to strengthen member service and delivery?

The current organizational structure varies greatly among components. It appears unwieldy, hard to understand, and delivers different member experiences. Four of the ten repositioning recommendations deal with this challenge. Every deviation got that way for good reason as well as by habit. However, I do not believe one size fits all. Each component has unique circumstances which shape it. That said, all of us at every component level should reevaluate our preconceptions, which many recently have, and rethink what we do and why. We should ask what should we do locally and what is best done at AIA. Don’t duplicate. Coordinate.

The recent Member Service Resource Task Force recommendations are a superb guide through this dilemma. If we thoughtfully work through these ideas I am confident we can reshape our delivery of value to our members in ways that are more reliable, desired, efficient, and fair. The path has been laid out. We need to be open for change and follow it.

5. EMPOWERING THE NEXT GENERATION TO MEET THE CHALLENGES OF THE FUTURE
As the future of the profession, the challenges facing emerging professionals need to be addressed. There are increasing distractions and alternatives that are adversely impacting the pathway to licensure and the downstream consequences to meeting public demand and project delivery. What can the AIA do to affect a cultural shift to among Emerging Professionals and encourage all involved in the delivery of architectural services to stay connected with the organization?

There is a great deal we can do. I believe in AIA taking extraordinary measures to stay connected with our younger members, some of whom may not now be directly employed. We need each other. Everyone in AIA leadership I know agrees, but typical firm owners are still focused on the basic essentials of maintaining a practice in lean times. But talk is easy. Actions matter. Let me cite an example:

We have made a top priority for all of our Knowledge Communities to consider how they can include emerging professionals in their areas of special interest. The challenge is to reduce barriers to entry. About half have embraced the concept and have specific plans for increased EP participation. We
completed a summary dashboard for all to see that has served to highlight opportunities and create competition. At the same time this dashboard has been distributed through the CEP/YAF/NAC to make these opportunities known. Also, a young architect on my Board Knowledge Committee has the task of follow-up with each KC. Also, as soon as we became aware of the “Missing 32%” survey we cascaded it to all our KC’s for a couple of reasons. One, we wanted to get to more interested architects for the survey. Second, we wanted to sensitize KC leadership to the essence of the survey. I have shared this connection opportunity with Ashley Clark, President of the CEP. Together we will determine how to best take advantage and plans for next steps.

Changing a culture is difficult but possible. If all of us in leadership at every level do what’s possible, then emerging professionals will earn and enjoy their place at the table. We will be successful if we listen carefully to what is recommended by our next generation. And act.