Your building can do much more than keep the rain off your business; it can advance your business plan. To capture the full value of your capital program, you will do well to engage your architect in a discussion of your business goals, with your business leaders.

Educating Your Architect

In the previous installment of Design Is Good Business, we outlined several factors that need to be understood before design begins: program, site, regulatory and political context, and budget and schedule constraints. By working through these factors with your architect, you not only develop a set of quantified needs, you also begin to give the architect a sense of your values, goals and aspirations. Understanding these deeper, often less quantifiable factors will enable your architect to go beyond the bare satisfaction of need, to design a building—a place—that enriches your life and work. It may be useful to look first at how this contributes to the design of a home, then to move on to how it applies to businesses and other organizations.

For a private residence, the architect will want to learn what you like and don't like about buildings you've experienced, as well as ones you've seen in photographs. Styles, colors, materials, the play of light and shadow, relationships between the indoors and outdoors—there are innumerable qualities that you can identify in existing places and share with your architect, so that she has a tangible grasp of your preferences.

But your architect will also want to know your thoughts and feelings about things other than buildings. What sorts of music do you enjoy? What are your favorite books? Are you outgoing...
or reserved, active or contemplative? Do you like order and predictability, or do you prefer serendipity and surprise? Through such questions and open-ended discussion, the architect can capture qualities and characteristics that you may not ever have experienced in a building, but that can be translated into architectural terms. It's a process of discovering not only the preferences you are aware of, but also preferences and possibilities that you may have never before considered. The result can be a home that gives you much more than you could have imagined.

That sort of deeper exploration makes obvious sense for a residence, and you're likely to have such conversations as a matter of course. Businesses and organizations, however, often assume that all they are asking of the architect is to design a building that meets their known needs. They assume that deeper discussions are unnecessary. Such an approach overlooks valuable possibilities and opportunities.

For example, the British architect Peter Blake was once asked by a seaside community to design a recreation pier as a way to stimulate tourism. Before accepting the job, he visited the site, and he returned to the city authorities and told them, "You don't need a pier. You need to clean your beaches; they're filthy. If they were clean, people would use them." The city did as he suggested, and tourism increased without anything having been built. That's a dramatic instance, but you'd be surprised how often a good architect will warn you off of unnecessary construction.

But when you do build, you want to create the greatest possible synergy between your business or organizational goals and your architectural goals. For that to happen, the architect needs to understand what the business and organizational goals are. Explaining those goals and how you intend to achieve them is a crucial part of the architect's education. How you develop talent, how your staff collaborate with one another, how you introduce yourself to clients and customers—these and innumerable other business activities are profoundly affected by the shape and character of your building. The better the architect understands where you're headed, the more your building will help you get there.

**Design doesn't add value, it multiplies it.**
2015 AIACC Honor Award for Architecture, Star Apartments, Los Angeles, CA, Michael Maltzan Architecture. A unique integration of social services, community recreational facilities, and 102 apartments for formerly homeless individuals.