

BUILDING YOUR FUTURE

“ THE BUILDING OF A CAREER IS QUITE AS DIFFICULT A PROBLEM AS THE BUILDING OF A HOUSE, YET FEW EVER SIT DOWN WITH PENCIL AND PAPER, WITH EXPERT INFORMATION AND COUNSEL, TO PLAN A WORKING CAREER AND DEAL WITH THE LIFE PROBLEM SCIENTIFICALLY, AS THEY WOULD DEAL WITH THE PROBLEM OF BUILDING A HOUSE, TAKING THE ADVICE OF AN ARCHITECT TO HELP THEM.

/ FRANK PARSONS, 1909

As Parsons implies in the above quotation, the building of a career—the process of career development—is a difficult but important task. Yet he also suggests that few individuals adequately prepare for their careers in a thoughtful, careful and deliberate manner. Instead, many often “fall into” a career while others make career choices that are often random and show little commitment to their occupations, often leading to worker dissatisfaction.

You may argue that a career is not something you create or plan, but rather simply just happens. However, like architectural projects, careers must be carefully planned. In many ways, designing your own career is parallel to designing a building. Programming, schematic design, design development, working drawings and construction are replaced in the career development process with assessing, exploring, decision—making, planning and job—searching.

ASSESSING

Know Thyself. —inscription over the Oracle at Delphi

When an architect designs a project, what is typically the first step in the process? Most likely, programming would be the answer. As William Pena points out in *Problem Seeking*, the main idea behind programming is the search for sufficient information, to clarify, to understand, to state the problem.¹ In a similar manner, when designing your career, assessment begins the process.

Assessing is the process of learning more about your self. Assess where you want to be: analyze what is important to you, your abilities, the work you would like to do and your strengths and weaknesses. Just as programming helps the architect understand a particular design problem, assessment helps determine what you desire from your career. It is an ongoing process that needs to be conducted throughout your entire career. In more detail, assessing includes examining your values, interests and skills. But what exactly are values, interests and skills and how do you determine them?

Values

Values are feelings, attitudes, and beliefs you hold close to your heart. Values reflect what is important to you; they tell us what we should or should not do. Work values are those enduring dimensions or aspects of our work that we regard as important sources of satisfaction.² Values traditionally held high by architects include creativity, recognition, variety, independence and responsibility.

Interests

Interests are those ideas, events and activities that stimulate your enthusiasm; they are reflected in choices you make about how you spend your time. In simplest terms, interests are activities you enjoy doing. Typically, architects have a breadth of interests because the field of architecture encompasses artistic, scientific and technical aspects; they enjoy being involved in all phases of the creative process—from original conceptualization to a tangible finished product.³

To determine your interests, for an entire month, note on your desk calendar what you most and least enjoyed doing each and every day. At the end of the month, summarize and categorize the preferences you have recorded. Another method is in ten minutes of continuous writing, never removing your pen from the paper or fingers from the keyboard. Answer the question: What do I like to do when I am not working?

Skills

Skills or abilities, unlike interests, can be learned. The three types of skills are functional, self-management and special knowledge. Having a functional skill means that you are able to perform some specific type of

activity, action or operation with a good deal of proficiency. In contrast, self-management skills are your specific behavior responses or character traits such as eagerness, initiative or dependability. Lastly, special knowledge skills are what we have learned and what we know. In *Architect? A Candid Guide to the Profession*, Roger Lewis highlights the following as essential skills to being an architect: graphic and visual skills; technical aptitude; verbal skills; organizational skills; memory and compositional skills.⁴

The importance of knowing your skills is echoed by Richard Bolles in his book, *The Quick Job-Hunting Map*. "You must know, for now and all the future, not only what skills you have, but more importantly, what skills you have and enjoy." With respect to skills, think back over the past five years. What were your five most satisfying accomplishments? Next to each, list the skills or abilities that enabled you to succeed. Do the same by reviewing your failures to determine traits or areas you want to overcome.

There are a variety of techniques that may be used to conduct an assessment. Those listed in this article are simply to get you started; others include writing an autobiography, taking empirical based inventories or psychological assessment instruments with the assistance of a career counselor. Regardless of the method you choose, only YOU can best determine what skills you have acquired and enjoy using, the issues, ideas, problems, organizations which interest you, and the values which you care about for your life and career. **C**

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¹ Pena, William, (1987). *Problem Seeking: An Architectural Programming Primer*, Washington, DC: AIA Press, p. 15.

² Figler, Howard, (1988). *The Complete Job Search Handbook*, New York, NY: Henry Holt and Co., p. 35.

³ Berry, Richard, (1984). "Profile of the Architect, A Psychologist's View," *Review*. Summer 1984, p. 5.

⁴ Lewis, Roger, (1985). *Architect? A Candid Guide to the Profession*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, p. 13.

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Because of his combined background in architecture and career development, he has a strong interest and expertise in "careers in architecture." He is the recipient of an AIA/AAF grant to launch the ARCHCareers.org, a Website dedicated to assisting individuals in becoming architects. He also teaches an elective course entitled, *Careers in Architecture*.

Prior to joining the University of Maryland, Lee served as the Assistant Dean in the College of Architecture at Illinois Institute of Technology for seven years. He is married and father of triplet daughters.

BUILDING YOUR FUTURE: EXPLORING AND DECIDING

You know the story of the three brick masons. When the first man was asked what he was building, he answered gruffly, without even raising his eyes from his work, "I am laying bricks." The second man replied, "I am building a wall." But the third man said enthusiastically and with obvious pride, "I am building a cathedral."

- Margaret Stevens

Given your career, are you laying bricks, building a wall or building a cathedral? Regardless of your answer, designing your career is one of the most important tasks during your lifetime with minor exception. Yet if it is so important, why do we spend such little time on it? Think about it!

Exploring

Students spend four or more years learning how to dig data out of the library and other sources, but it rarely occurs to them that they should also apply some of the same new-found research skill to their own benefit -- to looking up information on companies, types of professions, sections of the country that might interest them.

- Albert Shapero

After programming, schematic design is the next phase of the design process. Schematic design is that part of the process that generates a variety of alternative solutions; its goal is to establish general characteristics of the design including scale, form, estimated costs and the general image of the building, the size and organization of spaces. According to the *AIA Architects Handbook of Professional Practice*, the goal of schematic design is to establish general characteristics of the building design, such as the scale used to satisfy the basic program requirements and estimated costs.¹ Additionally, schematic design identifies major issues and makes initial decisions that serve as the basis of subsequent stages.

In the career development process, exploring is equal to schematic design. Exploration develops career choices or alternatives. It is the process of accumulating information about the world of work.² Its goal is to obtain career information on the plethora of careers or specializations within a particular career. For those of you that have chosen architecture as a profession, exploring is a necessary stage. You can investigate firms, the various career paths of an architect, and other areas.

How do you "explore?" As outlined in *Career Planning Today*, the author speaks of a systematic process that includes a) collecting, b) evaluating, c) integrating, and d) deciding.³ These four steps guarantee the highest possible level of career awareness. First, you must collect career information from a variety of sources. With respect to people, the most popular tool is called "information interviewing." As the name implies, you are interviewing someone for information, not a job. You could do this with one of the senior partners in your firm, a former faculty member, a colleague at another firm or your IDP advisor. Other ways to "explore" involving people include: attending lectures sponsored by the local AIA or your nearby university, volunteering through local AIA committee or other organizations, becoming involved with a mentor program and shadowing someone for a day.

As Shapero implies, use research skills to access any and all information you need. Visit your library and inquire about resources available to you. *The Dictionary of Occupational Titles* (DOT), *Occupational Outlook Handbook* (OOH), *Guide to Occupational Exploration* (GOE), *What Color is Your Parachute?* or others are resources that you might find valuable. In addition, investigate resources at your local AIA chapter or the library/resource center at a school of architecture. Two resources to explore include *Profile*, and the *AIA Architects Handbook of Professional Practice*.

Deciding

What most people want out of life, more than anything else, is the opportunity to make choices.

- David P. Campbell

The heart of the design process is design development. Similarly deciding is the heart of the career development process. Design development describes the specific character and intent of the entire project; it further refines the schematic design and further defines alternatives. Selecting from alternatives and evaluating them against a predetermined set of criteria is deciding.

How do you make decisions? Do you let others decide for you? Do you rely on instinct? Or do you follow a planned strategy of weighing the alternatives in making a decision? Be aware of your own decision making process. While some decisions can be made at the drop of a hat, designing your career requires more thought.

Deciding can be difficult and time-consuming, but realizing that the quality of decisions can be affected by the information used to make them, we quickly learn that making informed decisions is an important skill to learn.

Exploring and deciding are critical steps to successful career designing. Do not wait, but begin the process of building your future with career designing. **C**

For demonstration purposes, review this architectural application of the decision process:

Decision-Making Model	Architectural Application
1 / Identify the decision to be made	Need for new space or building.
2 / Gather information	Develop program (size, layout, budget, specifications).
3 / Identify alternatives	Alternative schemes that address same program.
4 / Weigh evidence	Evaluate schemes according to needs, preferences.
5 / Choose among the alternatives	Design selection.
6 / Take action	Construction documents, schedule, build-out, punch list.
7 / Review decision and consequences	Long range evaluation identifies changing needs.

¹ American Institute of Architects. (1973) *Architects Handbook of Professional Practice*. Washington, DC: American Institute of Architects.

² Powell, C. Randall, (1990), *Career Planning Today*, Dubuque IA: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Co., p. 42

³ Ibid., p. 42-43