

## The X Factor

Have you noticed that some of your colleagues or key staff seem to have the Midas touch. Clients love them, their teams run smoothly, and consistently bring project in on-budget and on fee.

What is the “X” factor that allows some to excel, where others struggle...

There probably isn’t one attribute that makes individuals or teams work great. But from my experience, and I would guess yours, the key is **great leadership**. The concept of leadership can seem a little abstract to many. What is it really? Is it a skill that you learn? Are you born a natural leader, what if your gene pool selectively omitted those traits? Not to worry, just as those successful leaders around us have discovered, we can all build on some key leadership traits that will propel us forward.

Participants in the AIA MN Leadership Forum are exposed to key leadership traits in an interactive format with real life examples of leadership by some of the most successful leaders within our community and beyond.

Tom DeAngelo, FAIA, Principal and former President at Architectural Alliance, spearheaded the creation of this program while serving as President of AIA Minnesota in 2008. When asked about the impetus for the program, Tom had the following to say:

*"Leadership development occurs throughout an architect's personal and professional life, and our Task Force at AIA Minnesota realized we could provide better support for new architects who are building their careers. The Leadership Forum encourages architects to connect with their professional peers to freely discuss common experiences and develop their own voice within the community. At Architectural Alliance, we view leadership transition as a constant effort, so this program resonates with our firm and probably with any firm that is interested in building new leaders for their evolving practices."*

So, what is it going to take to walk down the hall and tap a few of your emerging leaders on the shoulder to encourage them to participate in the program?

For me, I simply needed to be invited to participate by our senior leadership. It was that simple. With the support of the firm and their willingness to invest in my career and leadership development, how could I say no?

The benefits to the individuals participating are pretty clear, but what does the Firm get out of the investment. I didn’t have to look far to find the answer. Over the past two years Architectural Alliance has encouraged numerous employees to participate in the program. In all, six young professionals have participated in the program, quite an accomplishment as it has attracted some of the best young professionals in the twin cities. I felt that being accepted was a real honor. As a member the Advisory Team, I now know firsthand how diligent the selection committee is in accepting the best applicants to participate.

Why is AA's level of participation so high?

To find out, I sat down with Carey Brendalen, AIA, Principal and President of AA who offered a few thoughts on the subject.

1. Why has AA been so supportive of the AIA MN Leadership Forums?

*AA recognizes that as professionals and leaders we have a responsibility to lead within the community. Participation in this program is frankly an easy way to accelerate development and allows us to elevate the level of engagement of our younger professionals within the firm, community and profession.*

2. What is the value proposition to AA?

*Individuals that we have encouraged to participate already have leadership responsibilities (traits) within the firm. By supporting their involvement, we have the potential to improve the firm, and see the nomination as a form of recognition for the staff.*

*Developing these individuals as stronger more effective leaders enables them to be more effective as they represent AA with clients, in the community, and within the firm. Participation allows them to represent AA at a much higher level than otherwise.*

3. Why has AA sponsored three individuals in each of the two classes so far? Has there been any reservation to engage at this level?

*No – AA feels very fortunate that we have such a strong pool of candidates. All of the feedback from the participants has been extremely positive. It is a relatively small time and financial commitment on behalf of the firm. In the broader scheme of things we are growing the next generation of leaders, that's worth investing in!*

4. Why has AA had such a strong representation?

*It's a great program! Tom DeAngelo was instrumental in the creation of the program. He brings a level of enthusiasm that aids in communicating the value(s) of the program. Applicants are personally invited to participate as we believe that this program provides essential training for emerging leaders that extends into our community and our staff's personal lives.*

5. What would you say to encourage other firms to participate in AIA MN Leadership Forum?

*We see quite a bit of excitement being generated in our firm to participate in the program. Other young professionals are aspiring to follow in the footsteps of those that have participated. We like the momentum and excitement that the program is generating within our firm, beyond the skills, concepts, and vision that they are exposed to in the program.*

For those potential candidates and current firm leaders out there that are looking to improve the quality of leadership within your firms, please take the initiative to personally invite key staff to participate in

the AIA MN Leadership Forum this year. For those young aspiring leaders, don't hesitate to apply this fall. As a graduate myself, I can attest to the superb quality of the program and occasionally, even I am seeing a little "X factor" showing up in my personal and professional life.