



Council of Firms Knowledge Community

April 23 Meeting Notes

Topic: Firm Culture (Part 1)

Discussed Firm Culture of multiple offices represented at the meeting. Our discussion meandered around all kinds of cultural issues. We decide to shift discussion of Social Events + Community Service to our next meeting.

FOLLOW YOUR JOY

As some attendees are considering retirement soon, they have been refocusing on the things that have brought them the most joy throughout their careers. They recommend that we all do that, but recognize that some people are still needed to do the less glamorous tasks in an office.

Advice: remember why you became an architect, and, if possible, focus on what brings you joy.

STUDIO CULTURE

Studio Culture is prevalent; where everyone pitches in – “what does it take to get things done?” People lead with their strengths – whether design, quality, technical detailing; this sets the team up for success. Some firms discussed deliberately managing the energy in the office – pay attention to positive/negative energy and stay in touch with the teams to ensure engagement.

Firms who track **utilization** only have a disadvantage over firms who track **productivity**. People generally need to know what is expected and why it matters. Strong, collaborative work planning and holding people accountable to their hours/tasks give clarity to the work for staff.

FLEXIBILITY

There is a current challenge for firms to be flexible - with people working from home, coming in at later hours and seemingly casual about meeting project deadlines. Some firms allow work from home, but hold their staff accountable for staying connected and engaged on projects: logging into the network, calling in or joining online meetings and utilizing internal messaging.

Some firms have core hours – from 9-3 or 9-4 – where staff are expected to be present if they are not traveling that day. This allows flexibility in start and end time for their 8-hour day, and maximizes the staff available for team meetings and collaboration.

Some offices prefer their staff to be in the office – and off of their headphones – where they can be part of conversations, collaboration, spontaneous design discussions, etc. In order to thrive, people need to be present in the environment.

RECRUITING FOR POTENTIAL AND CULTURAL FIT

Several firms discussed recruiting and hiring for cultural fit, and looking for the candidate’s potential to be one of the next generation firm leaders. For some, it’s not just about getting the work done, but being in an environment where people and their personal “why’s” come first. (See “FOLLOW YOUR JOY” above!)

Many firms discussed their efforts to development of young staff – celebrate licensure, establish core hours, allow flexibility for life happening - family/social priorities of the emerging professionals. One firm talked about their obligation to junior stock holders and to their families.

CULTURE MAGNIFIED

Mergers and acquisitions magnify culture issues. Smaller firms may have a more organic structure; when acquired by a larger firm, that practice needs to be more formal. Firms who have shifted to an ESOP structure have had to evolve discussions of finances and profit – connect the people to their share value.

LEADERSHIP

Strong leadership drives the culture of any organization; principals model the behavior they should expect from their staff. If firm leaders are aligned on vision, values and mission, staff can get behind them. One firm has their values in a deck of cards that every employee gets when hired – “prompt and punctual”; “honor the commitments that you make”, etc.

Strong leaders share their stories and their firm’s history with the team.

[end of notes]

Miscellaneous: Attendees requested a meeting invite in lieu of an email announcement. For regular attendees who give permission for appointment, co-chairs will send an invitation.

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