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GENERAL CONTRACTORS BUILDING SUCCESS

Good Architecture Is Good Business

by Alan J. Cuteri, AIA



"Where we have seemed to fail is in understanding our own value, communicating or demonstrating that value and obtaining appropriate compensation."

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On the cover: Carnegie Mellon University's Intelligent Workplace. Photo by Karl Backus courtesy of Carnegie Mellon University.

In 1968 while I was in elementary school,

I witnessed the daily construction activity of a new Roman Catholic Church. The folded plate, reinforced concrete structure took shape on a forest of scaffold and planking. It was a dramatic site that captured my interest for an entire year. Every day during recess and just before the lunch hour, I could watch and listen to the symphony of construction activity taking place. I soon learned that the individual who was responsible for this menagerie of activities resulting in this fascinating construction was called an architect, and the course of my life was set. I decided to be an architect.

As I would realize some 25 years later, architecture is a rapidly changing profession that originated over 3,000 years ago on the principles of the master builder. The master builder was to be knowledgeable and educated in the art of construction, physics, physical proportions, the arts, the sciences and weather. These principles of design are delineated in the *Ten Books of Architecture*, a manuscript written 2,000 years ago that would serve as a basis for the design of buildings into modern times.

Today, we find ourselves at a crossroad of change in the profession brought on by the dynamics of commerce, construction practices, innovations in technology, and an unbridled legal system. In 1929, a large Pittsburgh high school was constructed with a set of drawings, roughly 30 sheets, which graphically showed the final design of the building. The drawings were minimal in their detail and notation, yet clear in their intent and selection of materials. Accompanying these documents was an 85 page book, hard bound, 1/2 size pages that were the complete specification and contract for construction. Simplicity of documentation belied the intricate wrought iron handrails, terra cotta cornices and intricate wood working that embellished this building. Renovation and expansion of this facility some 55 years later required over a hundred and thirty drawings of significantly greater detail and complexity. The specification was published in two volumes with approximately 750 pages, full size. Many things have changed in fifty-five years.

Architects today are responsible for complying with 1,000 page code books, multiple government agencies and ev-

ery conceivable rule and regulation regarding subjects from wetlands to freon escaping from an old refrigerator. Architects are also responsible for creating invincible documents that hold up to the most creative and sometimes illogical scrutiny. We are expected to provide detailed evaluation and design of multiple building systems for climatic comfort, cost-effective operation and energy efficiency. We must provide innovative, technology enhanced buildings with the latest materials and construction techniques, built within budget and, of course, *no change orders*.

With the skills, liabilities and demands of our profession increasing, architects today are still considered a commodity by some. Unbelievable. Architects are the only professionals that are trained and educated to provide for complete coordination of the hundreds of thousands of decisions that are necessary to execute even a modest building project. We create real measurable value in buildings we design: value in the design of low maintenance facilities, value in the operational efficiency of a corporate headquarters, value in the flexibility of our buildings to be refitted and adaptable for the latest technological changes of climate control and computer systems, now and in the future, at minimal cost.

Architects routinely take raw sites and through detailed site utilization studies, zoning variances and code analysis, create a site that can sustain real capital development. The architect has increased the value of that property before a structure is built. Where we have seemed to fail is in understanding our own value, communicating or demonstrating that value and obtaining appropriate compensation. A corporate executive engaged in a major or minor project should already know that 'Good Architecture is Good Business'. Architects must begin to think like the executives for whom we design. We already anticipate the future trends and understand the bottom line. What we must do is educate our clients to retain us and compensate us as the valuable resource that we are.

During the coming year our public relations efforts, program events, and other efforts on behalf of our members will be measured against our theme for this year, "Good Architecture is Good Business". ▲