CONVERSATIONS TOWARDS AN EQUITABLE PRACTICE

29 April 2019 / Recruitment and Retention

COMMON THEMES

- Implicit bias can be combated by using a consistent methodology for interviewing and evaluating candidates

- Implicit bias training is desired for firm leadership

- Mentorship and flexible work hours help retain talent

- A range of project types is attractive to candidates

- It is important the path for promotion and leadership is clear to employees

- Employees want to feel valued for their work

- Rather than looking for candidates that "fit" the culture, look for candidates that "enhance" the culture

NOTES BY GROUP

Group 1:

- Reasons cited for being attracted to a firm/position
  - Strong leadership, diverse staff
- Inclusion
  - Concerns: lack of equity in opportunities, pay, and promotion – can be the catalyst for leaving the profession
  - Strategies for improvement
    - Reshape the experience for others coming in
    - Leadership understanding the entire firm's culture
    - Prevent "off-ramping" by providing support
- Strategies for retention

- o Training at all levels
  - ▪ Implicit bias
  - ▪ Bystander interaction
- o Office Culture & Transparency
  - ▪ Consider what is the office culture(s)
  - ▪ Consider how the office articulates its culture to potential candidates
  - ▪ Improve messaging within the firm

Group 2:

- What retains employees
  - o Diversity of work and challenges (project types and responsibilities)
  - o Care for well-being for staff -- work/life balance
  - o Flexibility with schedule
  - o Career growth support and opportunities for advancement
  - o Values-based work
  - o Opportunities for employees to feel like they can "be themselves"
- Hiring Process
  - o Look beyond traditional hiring pools and internal or word of mouth candidates
  - o Internships can provide people from different backgrounds to gain exposure to a company and vice versa
  - o Encourage hiring from different schools, look at HBCUs (historically black colleges and universities)
  - o Recruiting services can sometimes be more challenging
- Fit & Culture
  - o Collaborative profession – we want to work with people we enjoy working with
  - o Sometimes the "different" person is key to a project team's success
  - o Important to promote a wide range of skill sets, not just a specific personality type (ie the outgoing person)
  - o Ask candidates about their goals and expectations
- Recognition and promotions
  - o Promotion is an indication of being valued by employer

- Consider how to recognize the contributions of great architects that are not on the leadership track
- Different roles and opportunities (IT, graphics) and associates
- If the path to leadership is undefined beware of slipping into the "old boys' club"
- Consider if project management always required for advancement
- Purpose of promotion
  - Recognition
  - Pay
  - Feeling like your work is adding value to the project/firm
  - Separation of bonuses from promotion (used to be connected to title, now tied to responsibility)

Group 3:

- Consider how values change over the course of a career
  - Family obligations
  - The perceived expectations for a single person are different than those for someone with a family
- Unequal repercussion and rewards for "team players" versus those who leave at the close of business hours
- Expectations from leadership: "Go home!" Vs "I need 20 things by tomorrow"
- Interviewing perspective hires
  - Whole project team present (or available) to establish culture
  - Transparent expression of firm culture
  - Proactive value alignment

Group 4:

- What attracts people to their current position/firm
  - Project type
  - Flexible hours and/or the ability to work remotely
  - Family atmosphere and fun activities (ie recognizing birthdays)
- Defining the "Dream job"
  - Having flexibility while maintaining the opportunity for advancement
  - Contributing to the future of the company

- See projects from start to finish
- Seeing people in management that are similar (ie women, parents, keeping flexible/balanced schedules)

- Hiring
  - Most firms typically have 1 – 2 interviews
  - Sometimes an entire firm will meet a candidate
  - Inconsistencies with interview styles within a single firm
    - Number of people present
    - Types of questions asked
  - Example of firm standardizing interview structure
    - Step 1 –HR/supervisor weeds through candidate pool
    - Step 2 – interview with firm leaders
    - Step 3a – interview with firm principals (final vetting step, but pretty confident the candidate will be offered the job)
    - Step 3b – Interview with BIM manager for BIM knowledge/experience verification
  - Gender bias: Women versus men fitting skill set
    - Job postings: women are often deterred from applying if they feel they do not satisfy all criteria
    - Interviewing: employers' bias that men will figure out missing skills, but women will not
  - Blind resume review to encourage diversity and minimize bias
- Strategies for Retention
  - Mentorship
  - Clear path to leadership and/or clear future with the firm
  - Transparency (salary, bonus, firm profitability)
  - Offer continuing education opportunities

Group 5:
- Understanding why people leave
  - Survey to understand why people leave
  - Some people are not honest in exit interview
  - People leave when they don't feel included

- Strategies for addressing retention
    - Target action items when issues arise and manage change quickly
    - How does everyone feel heard?
    - Clear path to career progress/promotion
    - Clear message about how projects are staffed
    - Consider how women can be the hardest on other women
    - Younger women do not necessarily know what it was like for older women in the profession
    - Desire to see leaders that "look like me" – greater diversity in leadership
    - Mentorship
- Focus groups within the firm
    - Culture group: tackles difficult conversations
    - HR group: formal training on implicit bias
- Recruiting and implicit bias
    - Remove name from resume
    - Even the playing field as much as possible
        - Standardize interview questions
        - Maintain consistency
    - Educate everyone on the interview team on implicit bias
    - Collect consistent feedback
    - Online forms that prompts interview questions and ranking candidate
    - Self-analysis of ranking to see if there are patterns of bias
- Reaching a diverse talent pool while they're young in order to diversify the pipeline
    - ACE Mentor Program https://www.acementor.org/
    - Hip Hop – elementary and middle school kids camp where professionals come to mentor http://hiphoparchitecture.com/

Groups 6 and 8:
- Primary drivers for leaving the profession
    - Economy
    - Different design objectives
    - Career pinch points
    - Inability to make payroll

- o Company growth and challenging cultures
- Mentorship and Retention
  - o Finding a good mentor and/or advocate at larger firms
  - o Pairing individuals with higher-ups
  - o Smaller formats, setting up meetings with principals
  - o Opening more channels to leadership
  - o Working in teams and fostering relationships
  - o Mentee should be proactive in mentor selection
- Addressing Inclusion
  - o Trainings and allowing difficult conversations
  - o Establishing "Vocab 101" and bringing in an outside facilitator
  - o Assumptions are born when transparency is lacking
  - o Rather than looking for candidates that "fit" the culture, look for candidates that "enhance" the culture
  - o Finding a way to compete with unconscious bias in hiring process
  - o Visa process for new hires
    - ▪ Random process for visa selection is a challenge
    - ▪ Consider how this affects diversity
    - ▪ A financial consideration
  - o Consider the track to motherhood and unconscious bias
  - o Rigid adherence to 9 – 5 hours leads to a retention problem
    - ▪ If working from home there must be employee trust
    - ▪ Consider half-day Fridays
    - ▪ Opportunities for flexibilty
- How firms seek candidates
  - o Vertical movement is preferred
  - o Attempt to cast a wider net
  - o AIA job listings
  - o Consider "hire-backs" – people returning
  - o "post & pray"
  - o Establishing relationships with more diverse organizations

- Starting the Equity/Inclusion Conversation
  - Training at the leadership level
  - Using "JUST" as a kick-off and identifying key areas to improve https://living-future.org/just/
- Company Culture – what's critical and how it's changing
  - Open dialogue – transparency
  - Compensation transparency

Group 7:

- What people are looking for in a position/firm
  - Perceived culture
  - Different types of work/opportunities
  - Professional female presence
  - Inclusive and friendly environment
  - Feeling that everyone has a voice and a say in their professional path
  - Lack of egos
  - Openness to do more
  - Constantly being challenged
- Early Career: what would have helped in the day-to-day?
  - Being linked into the larger project and understanding why specific tasks matter
  - Having ownership over different tasks
  - Co-worker relations
  - Mentorship
- Changing Values
  - Valuing people over projects
  - Shared values about the work
  - Valuing flexibility and greater respect for team members' time
  - Personal autonomy
- Recruitment – what the firm communicates externally
  - Social media
  - Open communication of current employees
  - Branding on website: communicate versus advertise
  - Culture guide: passed along with job offer

- How firms address inclusion
    - Diversified interviews
    - Family events/ care of employees' families (especially out of office events)
    - Visa sponsorship
    - Upfront transparency and educated clarification

THANK YOU FROM YOUR SESSION LEADERS

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