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
Training at all levels
  ▪ Implicit bias
  ▪ Bystander interaction
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
o See projects from start to finish

o Seeing people in management that are similar (ie women, parents, keeping flexible/balanced schedules)

- Hiring
  o Most firms typically have 1 – 2 interviews
  o Sometimes an entire firm will meet a candidate
  o Inconsistencies with interview styles within a single firm
    ▪ Number of people present
    ▪ Types of questions asked
  o 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
  o 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
  o Blind resume review to encourage diversity and minimize bias

- Strategies for Retention
  o Mentorship
  o Clear path to leadership and/or clear future with the firm
  o Transparency (salary, bonus, firm profitability)
  o Offer continuing education opportunities

Group 5:

- Understanding why people leave
  o Survey to understand why people leave
  o Some people are not honest in exit interview
  o People leave when they don’t feel included
• Strategies for addressing retention
  o Target action items when issues arise and manage change quickly
  o How does everyone feel heard?
  o Clear path to career progress/promotion
  o Clear message about how projects are staffed
  o Consider how women can be the hardest on other women
  o Younger women do not necessarily know what it was like for older women in the profession
  o Desire to see leaders that “look like me” – greater diversity in leadership
  o Mentorship

• Focus groups within the firm
  o Culture group: tackles difficult conversations
  o HR group: formal training on implicit bias

• Recruiting and implicit bias
  o Remove name from resume
  o Even the playing field as much as possible
    ▪ Standardize interview questions
    ▪ Maintain consistency
  o Educate everyone on the interview team on implicit bias
  o Collect consistent feedback
  o Online forms that prompts interview questions and ranking candidate
  o 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
  o ACE Mentor Program https://www.acementor.org/
  o 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
  o Economy
  o Different design objectives
  o Career pinch points
  o Inability to make payroll
• 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 flexibility

  • 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**
  o Training at the leadership level
  o Using “JUST” as a kick-off and identifying key areas to improve [https://living-future.org/just](https://living-future.org/just)

• **Company Culture – what’s critical and how it’s changing**
  o Open dialogue – transparency
  o Compensation transparency

**Group 7:**

• **What people are looking for in a position/firm**
  o Perceived culture
  o Different types of work/opportunities
  o Professional female presence
  o Inclusive and friendly environment
  o Feeling that everyone has a voice and a say in their professional path
  o Lack of egos
  o Openness to do more
  o Constantly being challenged

• **Early Career: what would have helped in the day-to-day?**
  o Being linked into the larger project and understanding why specific tasks matter
  o Having ownership over different tasks
  o Co-worker relations
  o Mentorship

• **Changing Values**
  o Valuing people over projects
  o Shared values about the work
  o Valuing flexibility and greater respect for team members’ time
  o Personal autonomy

• **Recruitment – what the firm communicates externally**
  o Social media
  o Open communication of current employees
  o Branding on website: communicate versus advertise
  o Culture guide: passed along with job offer
• How firms address inclusion
  o Diversified interviews
  o Family events/ care of employees’ families (especially out of office events)
  o Visa sponsorship
  o Upfront transparency and educated clarification

THANK YOU FROM YOUR SESSION LEADERS

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