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Downsizing, Layoffs and New Opportunities for Architects

By Betty Doo

You are laid off or fear that a layoff will occur given the state of the economy. What happens next?

First, don't panic. Many people have experienced layoffs - they recover and you will too. In fact, this can be the opportunity you need to make important shifts in your career to better prepare for the 21st century.

Architecture is a diverse, complex and interesting field that demands many different skills, capabilities, and roles. Perhaps your current work focus or specialty area is not as available in the current economic climate. Therefore, you may need to consider other options. Rather than jumping immediately into building a resume and spending hours surfing the internet for job postings, consider stepping back and taking some time to reflect upon your career in a more thoughtful and analytical way.

Self Understanding

Two questions to start with:

- What do you most enjoy about your work in architecture?
- What are you really good at?

Consider the many components of the architectural industry, including: design, project management, leadership, technology, marketing, finances, structural engineering, problem solving collaboration, direct client interface (or NOT interfacing with clients), writing, analyzing, drawing, building, constructing, presentations, critiquing others' work, working solo vs. on teams, and teaching. It is indeed a rich and varied profession.

Take stock and be brutally honest with yourself as to what you really enjoy about your work and what you don't, as well as what you are good at, and not so good at. This gives you a starting point from which to begin the process of moving forward.

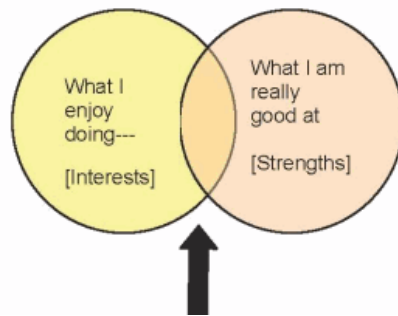


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Your greatest leverage for successful, meaningful and engaging work is at the intersection of these 2 areas: your strengths and your interests. For example, you may love technology but find you are not really good at it. You have several options- one is to improve upon your technology skills; another is to focus on areas less technology-oriented.

Alternatively, you may realize you are good at managing people, but don't really enjoy it. Consequently, you may consider options that focus less on people management and more on implementation. These are just a couple of examples. There are clearly a number of scenarios, and it is worth putting some time into getting as clear as possible about what you enjoy, as well as your strengths and capabilities. This provides a baseline for where to go next.

Market Trends

Once you determine the overlap between your core interests and strengths, you need to understand how these apply to the world at large. For example, what is the market for these overlapping areas? This is, in essence, where the rubber meets the road. How do you find meaningful work that matches your strengths and interests, in a down economy and a changing world? Granted it is not an easy task; however, out of challenges and crises often come new opportunities and the greatest innovations.

So, consider what is currently happening in the world of architecture. What can we expect in the future? What are the trends? How can you best utilize your skills and interests within the field of architecture, or maybe even outside the field in related professions?

The world is changing and the “macro” economic or business realities will be quite different in the future than in the past. In order to keep ahead of the game, be willing to open your mind to options you may not have considered before. Some of the trends you can be looking out for include:

- Going Green—the focus on sustainability will lead to many ecologically sound products, and design and build opportunities
- Technology— innovations in technology will continue to play a major role in the field of architecture
- From Private to Public sector---in the coming years there may be increased opportunities in the public sector as the government invests in infrastructure and other jobs-creating ventures
- From Specialist to Generalist—if you find a reduced need for your particular area of expertise, you might consider developing greater generalist skills to be marketable
- Collaborative ventures—Teaming up with other professionals or connecting across disciplines can provide viable new business opportunities

Now the big question: how to get from here to there?

Strategies for Success

One does not usually walk right into a new career opportunity; it takes time and effort, maybe even blood, sweat and tears. But focus, perseverance and optimism will help. Consider your short and longer term needs. In the short term, you need a job, money to support your lifestyle, your family, etc. In the long term, you want a rewarding career. This is the time in which reflecting upon your longer term goals may be most valuable. It also helps to inform your short term needs. If, for example, you want to go into the “green” industry, what skills will you need to develop to position your entry? Can your next job, even if not ideal, at least prepare you for your ultimate goal?

One strategy with the greatest likelihood for a successful outcome is getting involved in Social Networking. Social networking is receiving lots of media attention today and for good reasons. In essence, it has created a whole new world—a world of short and long distance connections, information sharing, innovations, and new ideas. Examples of social networking include: Facebook, LinkedIn, MySpace, Twitter, Ning and virtual worlds such as Second Life. These online mediums can assist your career in many ways, helping you land a job in the short term, and providing you with an array of contacts, ideas and resources that will assist your life-long career development.

So worried about being laid off? Or maybe you already are. If you take a “glass half full” approach, you may find yourself eager to explore new options and one day may even feel it was the best thing that ever happened to you.

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