

More Than You Expected?

Architects: Truth *AND* Dare

A Special Position

Some might say architecture is a rather curious profession. We are **very highly esteemed** by the public. According to the Harris Poll ⁽¹⁾, 72% of the public rated architecture a prestigious occupation - seventh highest of any profession.

Yet according to extensive AIA research⁽²⁾ the **public really doesn't understand what Architects do**.

Perhaps it's not surprising that the AIA's groundbreaking Advancement Statement – an outcome from the multiyear Repositioning effort – led with the Architects top aspiration: “**Elevate Public Awareness**”. The number two - “Advocate For The Profession” – when considered from a high level is closely aligned. The recently release AIA National's “Message Book” addresses this lack of public understanding by building a road map towards using the power of the 200+ components spread across the United States. If every Architect and every AIA component could relay a clear, simple, and consistent message about the value of architecture, the impact would probably be on an order of magnitude greater than we might achieve through purchased media time. ⁽²⁾

More Architects Needed?

Given the “special sauce” that seems to be aligned with architecture's position of very high public esteem, perhaps you would also not find it too surprising that a recent study found a **correlation between “Architectural Education” and “Economic Prosperity”** :

“ New York City graduates twice as many students in design and architecture as any other U.S. city, but the City's design schools are not only providing the talent pipeline for New York's creative industries— they have become critical catalysts for innovation, entrepreneurship and economic growth.”⁽⁵⁾

The conclusion of this study: **MORE people trained as Architects leads to MORE innovation, entrepreneurship, and economic growth.** ⁽⁶⁾

“Data shows that nearly 20 percent of all Pratt, Parsons and SVA graduates went on to start their own businesses— a much larger percentage than design schools elsewhere. Graduates of NYC's design schools founded many of New York's most visible and influential design firms, including Studio Daniel Liebeskind, Diller Scofidio Renfro, SHoP Architects, Smart Design, Ralph Applebaum Associates, Calvin Klein, Marc Jacobs and Donna Karan International.”

This makes perfect sense to me. Rather than considering “current demand” for traditional architectural services a limiting factor, the reality seems to align with the notion that the full package of skills associated with architecture has the potential to **create its own economic engine**.

Given the impact of the recession on our “pipeline” of leadership and skills for the traditional practice of architecture, it's also not so surprising that there are emerging many **new models of architectural practice** that do not rely solely on a “developer” or “civic institution” as the motive force to create and reshape the built environment. Architects are increasingly **finding ways to be the motive force** themselves.

But is there some deeper level of alignment that creates a “limit” on how impactful our profession might ultimately be? Perhaps there is something about “Architects” essence that is, in itself, rather rare.

Relatively Rare

Having worked with about 1,600 families in shaping their homes over the last 35 years, I've heard from clients countless times: **"I was going to be an Architect."** Yet, there are only about 107,000 of us in the country ⁽³⁾. To put that into perspective, there are about 854,000 doctors, 1.3 million attorneys, and 1.2 million accountants bolstered by another 1.6 million bookkeepers ⁽⁴⁾. The most common reason I've heard - "too much math" - seems unlikely to fully account for our low numbers. Perhaps there is something more going on.

I was fascinated by some research, albeit limited in scope, that found a **profound correlation between Architects and two Personality Types**. As reported a few years ago ⁽⁷⁾, Architects tend to mostly fall into just two of the 16 Meyer's Brigg's Personality profiles: **ENTJ and INTJ**. While these are among the most rare personality types (1.8% and 2.1% of the general population), they were found in 31% and 20% of Architects. In other words, over HALF of the sample was one of these, which are among the most rare in the general population. And they differ only in that one group is more extroverted than the other ... hmmm ... **rainmaker versus the studio master?**

Let's dive in a little closer to look at the characteristics that these types align with ⁽⁸⁾:

ENTJ Personality: "The Commander"

"Your time is limited, so don't waste it living someone else's life. Don't be trapped by dogma — which is living with the results of other people's thinking. Don't let the noise of others' opinions drown out your own inner voice. And most important, have the courage to follow your heart and intuition. They somehow already know what you truly want to become. Everything else is secondary." Steve Jobs

ENTJs are natural-born leaders. People with this personality type embody the gifts of charisma and confidence, and project authority in a way that draws crowds together behind a common goal. ENTJs are characterized by an often ruthless level of rationality, using their drive, determination and sharp minds to achieve whatever end they've set for themselves. Perhaps it is best that they make up only three percent of the population, lest they overwhelm the more timid and sensitive personality types that make up much of the rest of the world.

If there's anything ENTJs love, it's a good challenge, big or small, and they firmly believe that given enough time and resources, they can achieve any goal. This quality makes people with the ENTJ personality type brilliant entrepreneurs, and their ability to think strategically and hold a long-term focus while executing each step of their plans with determination and precision makes them powerful business leaders. This determination is often a self-fulfilling prophecy, as ENTJs push their goals through with sheer willpower where others might give up and move on, and their Extroverted (E) nature means they are likely to push everyone else right along with them, achieving spectacular results in the process.

ENTJs are true powerhouses, and they cultivate an image of being larger than life – and often enough they are. They need to remember though, that their stature comes not just from their own actions, but from the actions of the team that props them up...

INTJ Personality: "The Architect"

It's lonely at the top, and being one of the rarest and most strategically capable personality types, INTJs know this all too well. INTJs form just two percent of the population, and women of this personality type are especially rare, forming just 0.8% of the population – it is often a challenge for them to find like-minded individuals who are able to keep up with their relentless intellectualism and chess-like maneuvering. People with the INTJ personality type are imaginative yet decisive, ambitious yet private, amazingly curious, but they do not squander their energy.

“You are not entitled to your opinion. You are entitled to your informed opinion. No one is entitled to be ignorant.” Harlan Ellison

A paradox to most observers, INTJs are able to live by glaring contradictions that nonetheless make perfect sense – at least from a purely rational perspective. For example, INTJs are simultaneously the most starry-eyed idealists and the bitterest of cynics, a seemingly impossible conflict. But this is because INTJ types tend to believe that with effort, intelligence and consideration, nothing is impossible, while at the same time they believe that people are too lazy, short-sighted or self-serving to actually achieve those fantastic results. Yet that cynical view of reality is unlikely to stop an interested INTJ from achieving a result they believe to be relevant.

Rules, limitations and traditions are anathema to the INTJ personality type – everything should be open to questioning and reevaluation, and if they see a way, INTJs will often act unilaterally to enact their technically superior, sometimes insensitive, and almost always unorthodox methods and ideas.

INTJs radiate self-confidence and an aura of mystery, and their insightful observations, original ideas and formidable logic enable them to push change through with sheer willpower and force of personality. At times it will seem that INTJs are bent on deconstructing and rebuilding every idea and system they come into contact with, employing a sense of perfectionism and even morality to this work. Anyone who doesn't have the talent to keep up with INTJs' processes, or worse yet, doesn't see the point of them, is likely to immediately and permanently lose their respect.

Do recognize yourself, colleagues or coworkers in one or both of these outlines? Perhaps our **relative rareness is a function of the “magic”** it takes to thrive in our complex profession; and it hints at the remarkable potential for us to be even more impactful in influencing the realization of aspirational qualities of places shaped and created for people.

Curious indeed.

When I put all this together as President of the AIACC, and squint just a bit, I see a close alignment with our strategic plan, as well as the drivers of our motion forward. Through this lens, consider some of the milestones from our recent Board Meeting on November 4th in Orange County:

- **The AIACC Dashboard.** Launched after a year of effort, this new graphic tool takes a wealth of data and puts it into a visual form. **Data impact at a glance.** The goal: **help our leadership focus our resources and energy into those areas we can make the most impact, and move to our “strategic parking lot” those programs which don't have the traction to be on our “A” list.** Our new Dashboard includes information on membership trends, our pipeline of people for the future, and prosperity in our architectural firms. This ongoing **pulse of Architect's prosperity** – the first in the entire country – is checking the very basis for sustainability of both the good things we do and the aspiration things we add to our agendas. In future iterations, I hope we find ways to include more detail, without adding clutter. For example, the present illustration does not highlight that the most prosperity challenged areas of our profession occur in small firms – which is particularly significant when one considers that nearly ¼ of our architectural businesses are one person and nearly 2/3 are four or less. Above a size of 20 people, prosperity was 100% in the high and very high level. There was also an interest ‘dip’ in firms of 10 to 20 – perhaps that is a size that has challenges associated with larger firms without the ‘cash flow’ for the infrastructure to address them easily.
- A deep **“Reboot” of the California Architectural Foundation.** This non-profit has been increasingly ineffective in the last eight years or so, at a time when it might have lit some **entrepreneurial sparks at that fertile intersection between students and students to be, academia, and our practices.** The new business model promises a much simplified operational and decision framework to respond to the increasingly common **opportunities to partner, leverage our influence, and engage in new opportunities** - some of which require the 501c3 status of the CAF.
- A first in the country **BIM Software Member Benefit program.** The launch of this new program follows years of research and effort directed to support the small and emerging firms that most need our direct assistance,

and it has been a personal passion. It effectively leverages our “largest in the country” membership to provide a very compelling value bundle in two robust BIM platforms, coupled with a unique support framework, perpetual license terms with optional upgradeability, and robust 360 degree interoperability that our members have asked for.

- **Influence:** specifically a “recast” of Advocacy in the broader context of “Influence” – the AIACC Board dove into the new AIA Message Book, using it to analyze how the AIACC and the Architectural profession in California can use this framework in advancing our influence with our regulators, legislators, business, institutions, and the public at large.
- **And much more:** The Board went on a deep dive economic review – a first release from economist Cliff Brewer of Dodge Data – which painted a picture of the likely business year ahead; we had updates on the co-location initiative; as well as the coming Executive Director transition process; engaged in a robust debate on legislative advocacy agenda; and a key consensus decision to set aside consideration of any major change in AIACC representational governance to focus on near term operational improvements; election of our new highly talented and energetic leadership for 2017 and beyond ... and ... well, you get the gist.

From this single meeting: **A robust plateful of ALL GOOD STUFF, just in time for Thanksgiving!!**

Cheers!

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- 1 <http://www.forbes.com/sites/niallmccarthy/2016/03/31/americas-most-prestigious-professions-in-2016-infographic/#36996d2a1994>
- 2 <http://new.aia.org/pages/16606-learn-how-to-be-an-effective-communicator>
- 3 <http://www.ncarb.org/Publications/~media/Files/PDF/Special-Paper/2015NCARBbytheNumbers.pdf>
- 4 <https://www.statista.com/topics/1244/physicians/>
- 5 <http://designobserver.com/feature/nyc-design-schools-catalysts-for-economic-growth/33158>
- 6 <https://nycfuture.org/research/designing-new-yorks-future>
- 7 http://www.architectmagazine.com/practice/a-difficult-character_o
- 8 <https://www.16personalities.com/inti-personality>