

# **GROWING YOUR RESIDENTIAL PRACTICE**

## **SEVEN STEPS FOR SUCCESS**

Dale Mulfinger, FAIA



- 1. Analyze Society's Desire to Build**
- 2. Shut Up & Listen**
- 3. Buildings are the Answer, Architecture is the Question**
- 4. Do Good Work**
- 5. Tell the World**
- 6. Hire Smart**
- 7. Strategize Growth**

## STEP 1

### ANALYZE SOCIETY'S DESIRE TO BUILD

- 75 million existing home owners
- .5 to 1.5 million new homes per year
- Home Depot and Lowe's = \$75 Billion/year
- Remodeling = \$100 to \$150 Billion/year

## **STEP 2**

### **SHUT UP & LISTEN**

- Architects need hearing aides
- Society wants to build better
- Home Improvement = Portfolio Investment

## **STEP 3**

**BUILDINGS ARE THE ANSWER, ARCHITECTURE IS THE QUESTION**

- Cape Cod vs. Poetics of Space
- Raum Plan vs. Great Room
- Avant Garde vs. Arriere Garde

## STEP 4

### DO GOOD WORK

- Solve your client's problems. Stay with the project. Correct flaws and/or omissions. Get dinner invitations.
- Americans are pragmatic. Interested in theory and ideas so long as their project gets built...and stays dry...and has added market value.
- Your clients want a finished project, not a set of drawings.
- Invent the magic wand.
- Ask your client why he/she needs you. Stay focused on their goals, and then add the charm and the wow!
- Make friends with neighbors, builders, and project vendors. Give them a pat on the back for a job well done.
- Negotiate a construction contract - Harness a builder's knowledge.
- Demonstrate to your clients that you are proud of their projects. Bring people to see it...including your spouse - House sit the project while they are on vacation - Frame a drawing for them.

## STEP 5

### TELL THE WORLD...YOU ARE PROUD OF WHAT YOU DO

- Lawn signs - the amazingly simple and easy marketing strategy.
- Document the work and progress, the press wants images and stories.
- Magazine and newspaper editors stare at blank pages... help them out.
  - Home of the Month
  - RAVE Awards
  - Fine Homebuilding
  - Magazine Stringers
- Teach an adult-ed class on home design - U of M Compleat Scholar.
- Rent a booth at your local Home and Garden Show...and speak at it.
- TV and Radio - make yourself available - no dead air.
- Write books and articles - Surprise your high school English teacher - Put editors to work.
- Last Resort - Pay for an ad... or series of ads.

## STEP 6

### HIRE SMART

- Always hire smarter people than you as they are your future partners.
- Hire diverse generalists... they are versatile and entrepreneurial - Diversity gives breadth to your firm.
- Hire tenacious people who get the job done - An “A” student from Wentworth is better than a “C” student from MIT.
- Don’t put out fires with a new hire - utilize contract staff for that.
- If a staff person doesn’t work out, let them go. He/she is better suited elsewhere.
- Honor staff with ownership of projects - give them credit within the firm and in public arenas.
- Get your young staff registered - fulfill IDP - you want to sell architecture by architects.

## STEP 7

### STRATEGIZE GROWTH

- In the early years, find partners from the outside - then grow your partners internally - Add diversity to expand market.
- Develop a horizontal model, not a vertical one. Share public persona of who you are - not a Frank.
- Law office model - compare to other professional organizations that work. Take a lawyer or doctor to lunch to learn from them.
- Share the wealth - empty the firm of monetary value to make it easy for young partners to buy in.
- Establish fairness - test it out and then revise.
- Share management - SALA utilizes 3 managing partner roles - Internal, external, and fiscal affairs - A 3 year tenure.
- Have an open office - open conference rooms and desk areas so young staff can hear, see and learn.