



Alex Leonard
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YLG Rep for former SCIC
Mentorship Program Participant

How did you find your way into the industry?

I grew up wanting to be an architect and started at the University of Nebraska as an Architecture major. After one and a half years, I realized that real estate developers are the ultimate decision makers. I wanted a more hands on development position, so I switched to Finance with an emphasis in Real Estate and Sociology. The job market was essentially non-existent when I graduated in 2009. I jumped at an opportunity to be an AmeriCorps volunteer working in low income neighborhoods in my hometown. We implemented new grants and funding to update building codes and sustainability measures through the mayor's office. Bigger and better things were calling me to California for the University of San Diego's Master of Real Estate program. That program allowed me to get my foot in the door through some development positions and I eventually landed a position at AvalonBay.

What advice would you give to an emerging young leader just starting their professional career?

I've found it crucial to have mentors, whether it's through ULI's mentorship program or a former or current boss. My mentors have really taken me under their wings and guided me to success. I look up to their leadership daily. As cliché as it sounds, it really boils down to who you know and building your network and fostering mentor relationships is key.

What traits do you think define a successful leader?

A good leader listens to his/her team and thinks before speaking. To inspire a group of people, you have to be in touch with your team and their concerns. Collecting information is key, but once you have that knowledge, a leader needs to be decisive and confident in his/her decisions.

What is your current job and what types of projects are you working on now?

As Development Manager at AvalonBay, my priority is to execute development on our new newest apartment communities. Development at AvalonBay is a cradle to beyond the grave mentality. We find new land on which to build multifamily properties, underwrite the project for the investment committee to fund, create a vision for a new community, manage consultants during design, review and insure construction quality and progress, and ultimately quarterback the community's lease up and stabilization. As AvalonBay builds to hold, my communities will be in our portfolio for years to come. I just completed two garden style communities in Orange and San Diego Counties. Those communities created over 600 new homes. I am currently under construction on a 371 home, mixed use project in West Hollywood as well as a 331 home community in Chino Hills.

What do you find most challenging about your profession on a day-to-day basis?

No two days are ever the same and you never know what the day can bring, which also makes it interesting and fun. There are many aspects to the job so you have to be able to switch between very different and complex tasks at a moment's notice. One second you are underwriting a deal, and the next you could be redlining a set of plans, approving construction submittals, or driving out to a construction site.

What are you looking for in terms of career development - OR In what areas would you like to professionally develop further?

I am looking to get involved in the community through increasing my volunteering and nonprofit participation. I think the benefits of helping others and guiding an organization to be better is hands down the best type of professional development.

Describe a situation that was a great learning experience.

As a young leader, I am compiling not just lessons learned on how to build better apartment communities, but also lessons in managing others and multitasking. With such a busy schedule and constant deadlines, delegation, time management, and record keeping are simple tasks I need to use more effectively to make my day run smoothly. Trying to tackle low hanging fruit at the beginning of the days allows me to take things off my to-do list before the list grows larger. Tracking daily goals and checking them off makes me feel productive and more accomplished. Every day is a learning experience. There is always something to be done better and more efficiently.

How do you deal with stress at work?

I grab a coffee before I come into the office and that makes everything right in the world (insert Starbucks product placement here). I also drive to sites so I find that audiobooks take my mind off the traffic. Outside of the office, I spend time at the park or the beach with my Labrador retriever named Lacy. My fiancé, Barbara, and I started a fitness program called The 12 in Irvine so that helps release any extra stress.