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How did you find your way into the industry?

S: I suppose you could say that I began my trek into the industry as far back as high school when I had the opportunity to take architectural design courses. In a more literal manner I really entered the industry while studying architecture at a local junior college and took the recommendation of a professor to work in the field to really see if it was something I was passionate about. I was hired by a local Fullerton based architectural design and build firm, after bringing in my portfolio of work, which stretched back to some of high school course work.

N: I knew I always wanted a career inspired by creativity. Throughout junior high and high school I took a variety of art classes to develop my drawing, painting, and design skills. When I was applying to colleges I came across a major called landscape architecture. I had never heard of it before and the course descriptions caught my attention due to the amount of design labs, field trips for on-site experience, and technical classes such as construction detailing and grading / drainage. It was the perfect mix of artistry, science, and math. I fell in love and have poured my heart and soul into this industry ever since.

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

S: You must get out there and try new things, you're going to learn and grow the most in the times when you put yourself out of your comfort zone. I wasn't sure if I was ready to work in an architectural office until I tried, and it wasn't until I did that, that I realized the work I really wanted to be doing.

N: Do not be afraid. Ask questions, build confidence, and constantly keep learning something new until you find your passion. Try something new even if it means you have to step outside your comfort zone. Growth happens when you push past the confines of the 'box' and gain new experiences.

What traits do you think define a successful leader?

S: Be willing to do the work and understand the work that you would ask of someone else. Always remember your mentors and take time to recognize the time they give you. Similarly set aside some of your own time to help mentor others.

N: A successful leader is someone who can keep their cool during stressful times while effectively directing others to attain project and office goals. Communication skills and time-management are crucial to becoming a successful leader as well as having the interest in mentoring others.

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

S: I'm currently a Senior Associate Designer at PlaceWorks, as a landscape architect my primary emphasis has been working on community development and design projects. I've had the opportunity to work with some of the country's leading developers and builders working on master planned communities and urban design solutions. These projects range in their type of work from policy planning to those focused on physical design. The breadth of projects that I have had the opportunity to work on is one of the aspects that makes each day interesting and different from the next. Somedays I'll be working through land plan designs for a 1200 home site moving just under 26 million cubic yards of dirt to a 6-acre site of 94 small lot single family homes.

N: I am currently a project manager at Lifescapes International Inc. in Newport Beach and have been managing the Palms Casino pool area and ground level remodel in Las Vegas for the past year. In addition to the Palms, I have the pleasure of working on high-end residential communities in Beijing, China, iconic projects such as Wynn Boston Harbor in Massachusetts, and a highly detailed landscape design for a custom home in Beverly Hills.

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

S: Managing time, whether you're good at managing it, or not, it constantly takes effort. The irony of course is that it takes time to do this.

N: The fact that deadlines / project designs can change so quickly. When it rains, it pours and I have to be able to adapt just as quickly especially with multiple projects changing at the same time and needing immediate attention.

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

S: Further setting aside time to provide mentorship to others, this is an ongoing process and something that I have been pursuing both through the ULI UrbanPlan program working with both high school students and college students alike in addition to continued work with the Landscape Architecture Professional Advisory Board at Cal Poly Pomona, meeting to discuss how we can influence and work with the school to further the industry and help the students be more competitive and innovative in the industry.

N: While it is difficult to predict where the future will lead me, I am in a field that I love where I am constantly learning. Although I am enjoying project management, I would like to have more opportunities to become more involved with the design side of projects and exercise my creative muscle.

Describe a situation that was a great learning experience.

S: This past year myself and Jeff Enes have Co-Chaired the UrbanPlan (UP) program for the OC/IE chapter, with the help of Kendra and Katie the new committee has been formed and we have

successfully carried out one UP session at Cal Poly Pomona. As facilitators, we must stimulate critical thinking in the students to draw out their ideas in a way that they can clearly describe why they arrived at their design solution. Often when presented with a design problem statement we want to as consultants in the industry provide design solutions, so learning to ask the question of why design decisions were made without providing our own can sometimes be a challenge. Learning to do this during the facilitation was difficult, often catching oneself realizing you're trying to help them arrive at a solution. Learning to do this effectively with the UrbanPlan team has been incredibly rewarding, as with all classroom settings not every student quite gets to that "A" level of understanding, the ones that do make it worth every minute.

N: While it is difficult to choose only one situation, I enjoy visiting completed projects to determine what was most successful, which materials worked out the best, and how we can improve on the next project. You are only as good as your last project so it is important to always stay on top of your game.

How do you deal with stress at work?

S: Know what you can do to change things and make the effort there, that will help to alleviate stress. The things you can't change you must accept or you may find yourself spending all your efforts worried and stressed about something that is going to be the way it is if you worry about it or not. Meanwhile the things you could have changed stack up. That and don't take yourself too seriously and love what you do, yes it's work, but if you're going to do it for 20, 30...50 years shouldn't you enjoy it?

N: I try to remind myself that stress is temporary and only lasts as long as I allow it to affect me. During my lunch break or after work I try to detach as much as possible so that I can return with a clear mind and more energy to continue to perform at a high level. On my free time I also try to fill my day with things that bring me joy and are life-giving such as taking a boot camp class, spending time with family and friends, gardening, and making succulent arrangements.