



ASID A PUBLICATION OF THE AMERICAN SOCIETY OF INTERIOR DESIGNERS

Buildings Have A Life Too

At a civic luncheon the other day, a colleague of mine overheard a local attorney announce that his efforts to find a designer for the new church had turned up more than 40 responses. Design firms everywhere, even those like ours in a small town far from the big-city giants, are facing tough competition for work from all fronts.

A NEW PHILOSOPHY

My partner and I had already experienced the frustration of chasing projects such as the church when we came across a newsletter by design marketer Claire G. Ross. His recommendations to “pursue clients, not projects” struck a chord with us. This refreshing insight came at a time when we had begun to notice that some projects seemed doomed from the start, not because of budgets or even chemistry but because client goals often were at odds with our core belief—that buildings have a life too!

Today, our philosophy affects not only our fit with clients but almost every design and cost decision we make. We are convinced that this cradle-to-grave view produces buildings that will stand the test of time and at a lower cost.

FACILITY CONSULTING SERVICES

Back in the early '80s, we gave away ballpoint pens imprinted with our logo heralding a team of “facility consultants” (as opposed to just plain interior designers and architects). Many of our prospective clients responded with “What the heck is a facility consultant, anyhow?” Luckily, we had a great deal of explaining to do.

Looking back, we credit the subsequent client dialogues with spurring us to develop a full cycle of facility services. Our message re-

mains as simple today as it was then. We want owners to know that our concern with buildings reaches beyond design and construction. We want to assure them that we'll be there after the fat lady sings.

A side benefit of our approach is that our team seems to build momentum and energy as we cycle through the passages, collecting facility data that can be reused for future projects. And the really good news is that our fees flow back to owners in many ways—through reduced maintenance and operations costs, through increased productivity and sales, and through better long-term decisions.

One of the first services we developed under our new banner as “facility consultants” was the facility assessment, or evaluation. This service evolved because of our desire to comprehend the full extent of facility problems before we undertook a questionable renovation.

For the assessment, we assembled a multi-disciplined design team to develop a grade card of each facility. Each of the major building systems—plus workplace function, furnishings and

equipment—was evaluated in terms of overall facility health. We reported major problems, helped analyze solutions and proceeded with priority projects—moving steadily forward through the planning and design passages of the cycle.

THE NEW INTERIOR DESIGN PROFESSIONAL

Many interior designers view specialized services such as facility assessment as fearsome—arguing that it risks fragmentation of the profession. I disagree. The facility problems that trail after today's widespread reorganization of companies cannot be tied in a neat little bundle during the design passage. And who do you believe is better equipped to resolve these new problems than designers, who walk the fine line integrating building function with aesthetics?

Interior designers need to worry less about fragmenting the profession and more about how to serve the client well. This means solving related facility problems before and after design projects cycle around. We must continue to develop new tools and skills in long-range planning, in computer-aided furniture tracking and space management, in ADA audits and lease-buy analysis, in facility assessments and work flow studies, in maintenance plans and much more.

A commitment to the philosophy that “buildings have a life, too” is a win-win situation for owner and consultant. Today, we no longer waste valuable resources chasing projects. We can boast of a handful of repeat clients and a fairly steady stream of challenging work—even in the lean years.

Rama Risley Adams, Allied Member ASID, is the owner of Proxemics in Nevada, Mo.

