

Brian's Continuing Education for New Brunswick Architects

The Architects' Association of NB asked Brian to participate in a 2-day industry event June 18 and 19 - more on that soon!

Since he was going to be there they asked him to deliver a 1/2 day of ConEd, specifically his session on *Strategies for Profiting from the Trends that are Transforming our Industry and Markets*.

He spends a lot of his time tracking those trends and thinking about strategies to seize the opportunities and manage the risks they present.

Meaning he is constantly updating the content for this module.

This time he focused on the critical need to shape the destiny of your business, not wait for the trends and other forces to define it for you.

Be proactive.

He cited a [recent report](#) by the Royal Institute of British Architects that paints a fairly dismal future for the profession there unless the profession and individual practices are prepared to make some fundamental changes. One architect is quoted in the report saying: *"In ten years we probably will not call ourselves an architecture practice, it will be something else entirely."* Another, part of a global architectural practice, commented: *"The invasion of the architect's role shouldn't be seen as a threat but as a natural change that can be exploited - we must find our own new opportunities and education should shift to accommodate that."*

Brian noted that the situation in Britain is not identical to ours in North America because the majority of British architects were employed by government until Margaret Thatcher thinned the ranks. In North America many (most!) architects who become unemployed "hang out their shingle". In Britain, they "put up their brass plate". Result - hundreds and hundreds of architects who had no interest in running their own practice (nor did they have the knowledge and skills to do so) suddenly found themselves doing exactly that.

Brian urged New Brunswick architects to "Get out of Your Comfort Zone" and differentiate their firm from others, noting that too many buyers of architectural services regard those services as a commodity today.

He offered examples of other sectors of the economy that have re-invented themselves, often many times over, while the architectural profession, generally-speaking, has failed to do so. Customers are asking for different kinds of services today, and architectural businesses need to develop the strategies to provide them.

Brian spent some time talking about strategy and business and strategic planning - he spends much of his time helping businesses plan and then implement their plans. He discussed the reasons why strategy is so critically important, how it is essential to creating and maintaining focus.

He used his own experience running his practice in Niagara to illustrate. He built the firm from nothing to 20 people through substantial investment in people - training, educating, mentoring for years. Meantime maintaining a strategy of strictly avoiding the hospitality market in Niagara. When the economy started to sputter, he resisted "right-sizing" (as layoffs were called in the early 90's) by stepping into that hospitality market in defiance of those strategies that had proven so successful. Most of those hospitality projects were a disappointment both professionally and

financially. He should have stuck to his strategy - he ended up "right-sizing" anyway when many of those clients didn't pay their bills.

Next up was a quick overview of the approach Brian uses when facilitating strategic and business planning for clients of Strategies 4 Impact!

- research and identify "inputs", those trends inside and outside the industry that may impact your practice and your planning
- explore the potential impact on your business
- identify the opportunities they present
- identify the risks or threats that come with them
- create the possibilities specifically for your business
- weigh the options, for example, using a cost/benefit analysis
- make some decisions
- detail the strategic plan, then the tactical plan to implement it
- do it

Brian spent lots of time highlighting some of the 'inputs' that could/should be considered by architects in developing their strategies, noting that there is no 'silver bullet' strategy, no panacea. Here are a few:

- renewable energy, peak oil, Alberta's Oil Sands
- sustainable design, net-zero buildings, The 2030 Challenge, Living Building Certification, LEED, Green Globe
- need for renewal and retrofit of our huge stock of existing, inefficient buildings - huge opportunities that come with a big challenge in sourcing financing (with an example of one U.S. approach that is working well - [Ygrene](#))
- the opportunities for, and risks associated with, innovation
- Canada's huge infrastructure deficit - Brian hears numbers as high as \$200 B - and a [report](#) citing the relationship between infrastructure investment and GDP growth
- shifts in population demographics and their many effects on demand for services AND the profession's ability to deliver them
- technology ... from building technology to BIM
- continuing consolidation in the sector
- growing diversification in the industry
- the importance of R and D, especially in a sector of the economy that doesn't do enough of it
- underperformance in the design and construction sector - statistics show 30% to 50% AND MORE of the energy and resources we put into design and construction are wasted

- RISK - risk transfer and risk management must be a key component of every business strategy. Brian listed a number of risks that owners are trying to shift to their service providers and discussed some of the ways they use to accomplish that shift.
- life cycle costing
- new forms of project delivery like P3s, Integrated Project Delivery and Lean Project Delivery
- the power of prefabrication, including reference to a 30 storey hotel in China completely built from start to finish, ready for occupancy, in 15 days ([see the video](#))
- globalization
- specialization
- government policy - decisions made by elected officials and their huge potential impact on the industry, the profession, every practice
- practice philosophy and values - is yours a "Procedures", "Grey Hair" or "Rocket Scientist" practice using David Maister's spectrum?

Brian wrapped the session acknowledging that the leaders of most architectural businesses, large or small, can't make the time to track and research these and so many other trends. Nor can they invest the time to translate all of this into strategies that will lead to success and profitability for their businesses.

Sustainability for their businesses.

That's the value that Brian and Strategies 4 Impact! deliver to clients - businesses in the design and development sector, their associations (like AANB) and their clients.