

REFLECTIONS BY LIZ - CONSENSUS BUILDING FOR A NEXT GENERATION FIRM

May, 2005

In my salon this month Michael Lauber, AIA, the new President of Ellenzweig Associates Inc., shared the story of the leadership and ownership transition from a first generation architectural firm that was basically a sole proprietorship into a next generation firm with more collaborative ownership and leadership. He highlighted the financial, logistical, legal and emotional issues involved in coming to an agreement which meets the needs of all the parties.

He then discussed the creative part of figuring out where the new leadership wanted to go and how it wanted the firm to be structured. He and his partners, Miltos Catomeris and Janet Ross, chose a collaborative management structure. They have a President as a visible face for the firm and they distribute the finance, operations, human resources and marketing functions among the three of them. They reach consensus on decisions, rather than taking votes. Also they have opened up the firm's management structure to be more transparent and to increase participation of the employees. The system is still new and evolving, but it is working.

Ellenzweig Associates was extraordinarily fortunate that they could make this transition. I have seen so many wonderful firms struggle and fail to make an internal transition because they couldn't trust each other, agree on the roles and/or be willing to take on the risk of ownership. It is a tribute to Michael, Miltos and Janet that they were persistent in their efforts for an internal transfer and that they found a leadership style that would work for them. Indeed, their emphasis on consensus has been critical in getting them to this new place. Michael's remarks are available on my website at www.lizlevin.com.

The salon series is over for this season. However, save Tuesday, June 21st for a celebration of Liz Levin & Company's second anniversary.

