

# WOMEN IN ARCHITECTURE

SELF-DEVELOPMENT AND CAREER  
ADVANCEMENT FOR MID-LEVEL  
PROFESSIONALS

A REPORT BY KAREN FUGLE

# SUPPLEMENT

INSIDE INSIGHTS: ADVICE FROM THE  
INTERVIEWEES



SLEEPINGGIANT

CONSULTING

# CONTENTS

PAGE	
03	FOREWORD
04	ADVICE 01 - APPROACH
05	ADVICE 02 - FIND AND DO WHAT YOU LOVE
06	ADVICE 03 - SUPPORT NETWORKS
07	ADVICE 04 - COMFORT ZONE VS RISK
08	ADVICE 05 - COMMUNICATE
09	ADVICE 06 - BE AND DO
09	ADVICE 07 - THE PRACTICE
10	SLEEPINGGIANT CONSULTING

# FOREWORD

One thing I enjoyed while interviewing mid-level female architects for my report was how inspiring they were. Passionate, committed, driven and willing to rise above all manner of challenges thrown their way. Many of the interview questions brought up barriers to success, yet I still left with a sense of excitement for their futures. Naturally, I was keen for their advice to be passed on to younger women on the career ladder.

However, it struck me that the advice seemed not only pertinent to younger female architects, but also to the interviewees themselves. On more than one occasion they would laugh with self-realisation and comment: "Hmm, maybe I should take my own advice!" I have to admit I'm one to do the same – that is, not follow my own advice. Or even realise that my advice is pertinent to myself, until it's been said to someone else.

So, why is it easier to give out advice than to apply it to ourselves? The answer is because we get stuck in our own limiting beliefs. We compare ourselves to others, we see our differences, and it's easier to view others as having their lives together. Whereas, in contrast, we know, all too well, our faults and imperfections, and fears and doubts. Our beliefs are due to our upbringing, our learning experiences and the cultures we inhabit. Suppose we don't see women at the top of the firm? Then it's easy to believe that you won't get there either. When we are on the outside of this, however, we can take a more objective perspective. As one interviewee says:

“

*You're an individual. Understand yourself well as an individual.*

You may not see women at the top of a firm, but you're you, you have your own strengths, believe in them, believe in

yourself, then you can achieve on your own terms.

I asked the interviewees: "What advice would you give to female architects about their self-development?" Once transcribed, I cut up the advice and piled them into themes. Themes that appear clear cut; there are many variations of "find and do what you love". To the point where we might question in return: "Are you [mid-level female architect] doing what you love? And if not, why not?"

So, dear reader, take inspiration/motivation/information from the advice but also pay attention to the words you give to others. There is a good chance it might be something you need to hear, too.



Karen Fugle  
SleepingGiant

# APPROACH



There was an integrated approach to self-development; a combination of work-based and home-based activities. It was essential to acknowledge the two, maintain the work/life balance, and ensure that you engage in activities that take you away from work and invigorate it.

- Identify your priorities and needs to improve yourselves for your health and wellbeing.
- Try to focus on your self-development as early as possible in your career. When you start a family, you have less time to self-improve.

TREAT SELF-DEVELOPMENT AS PART OF YOUR JOB AND KEEP UP THE MOMENTUM.

- Prioritise your time for development. If you do it with other people, you are more likely to stick to it.
- Goals shared are more likely to be achieved.

STOP SELLING YOURSELF SHORT. IF YOU WERE NOT UP FOR THE JOB, I'M SURE THE COMPANY WOULD HAVE NO PROBLEM LETTING YOU GO.

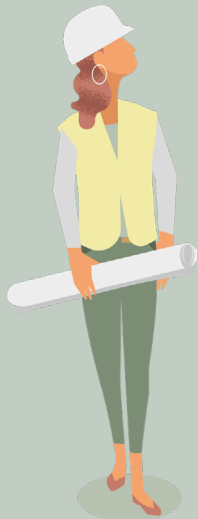
- Start self-development now. Whatever stage you are, whatever level, start now.
- Don't assume that other people know better than you do.

YOU'RE AN INDIVIDUAL. UNDERSTAND YOURSELF WELL AS AN INDIVIDUAL.

“

*Whenever I start getting depressed and down and all I can think about is stress, I start signing up for lectures, theatre, music, art. They remind me that I am part of a bigger thing. We are so focused on details but stick your head above the parapet, and suddenly you have a view.*

- Have a break away from it. Turn the phone off. Taking a break so that you can gain perspective is really key.
- Being a sponge is really important. Try to take on board as much as you can. Be open to new information and observe other people.
- Broaden your development - be diverse in what you learn.



# FIND AND DO WHAT YOU LOVE



The responses here could not have been more clear cut. You have a passion for being an architect; do as much as you can to design your situation and career so you're always working on the kind of jobs YOU love. Invest the time in getting there, and you will reap the rewards.

MAKE IT CLEAR TO YOUR OFFICE,  
LINE MANAGER OR DIRECTOR  
WHAT YOUR INTERESTS ARE.  
ALWAYS HIGHLIGHT THEM WHEN  
YOU HAVE A CHANCE TO SPEAK  
TO THEM.

- Always do things that you find rewarding, and find what drives you because you won't get that satisfaction from anywhere else.
- Do things that you really believe in. You have to do it because you love it. We are not getting that well paid for it. Believing in it drives you; keeps you motivated.
- Take time for yourselves and figure out what you want to do.

- Know what your interests are, what you are good at, from quite an early start. I've observed colleagues who have progressed quite quickly, and one thing they share in common is that they knew what they liked, what they were good at.
- Make sure you enjoy what you are doing every day and don't take it so seriously.

COME AT IT WITH A REALLY  
POSITIVE ATTITUDE. IF THERE  
IS STUFF THAT YOU WANT TO  
CHANGE, IF THERE IS STUFF THAT  
YOU WANT TO DO, THEN DO IT.  
BE THE CHANGE YOU WISH TO  
SEE IN THE WORLD.

“

*We are asking ourselves the wrong questions. Instead of emulating the leaders and taking up golf or learning CAD, we should be asking ourselves "what are we really interested in?" Take 30mins to ask yourself where you are going and how are you getting there? And if not, how are you going to get back on track?*

DO THE ARCHITECTURE YOU  
ARE PASSIONATE ABOUT.

- Find something you enjoy doing and invest your time in it. There are so many areas, so make it one you enjoy.
- Do something that brings you joy as you will enjoy it more.

# SUPPORT NETWORKS



The main report mentions support a whopping 59 times. Women would like to have more support from their manager and company to facilitate and increase opportunities. They also get a lot of help from their expanded network of colleagues, contacts and acquaintances.

CHOOSE TO BE SURROUNDED BY PEOPLE WHO SUPPORT YOU. SEEK OUT MENTORSHIP OR SPONSORSHIP.

- Make sure that you have a support network and sponsorship.
- Talk to people, peers. Networks like WIA are crucial. People you can sympathise with, people whom you can talk to about concerns.

“*Try to find a support network. I think that would make things less frustrating. People to talk to with the same experience.*”

- Get involved in other activities or groups or networks and groups outside of the office.
- Seek out things. Go to industry events or seminars and hear other people's opinions and get out of your bubble.
- Meet people. Network.

LOOK AT EXTERNAL PLACES - CBT, PSYCHOTHERAPY, COACHING SUPPORT FOR PROACTIVE WAYS FOR ACKNOWLEDGING YOUR SELF-DEVELOPMENT.

ROLE MODELS ARE REALLY REALLY IMPORTANT. TRY TO FIND GOOD ROLE MODELS - MALE AND FEMALE - AND TRY TO GET THEM TO MENTOR YOU. OR AT LEAST HAVE SOMEONE AT WORK YOU CAN SPEAK TO, TO HELP YOU WITH THINGS YOU WORRY ABOUT.

- Take advantage of peer-to-peer mentoring.

“*Networking and fellowship with peers is a good way to understand opportunities in the profession.*”



# COMFORT ZONE VS RISK



The interviewed mid-level female architects know that hard work alone won't get them where they want to be. Instead, they take on more responsibility to demonstrate that they can do the job. However, the impression that they frequently need to prove themselves capable before opportunities are awarded can cause self-doubt.

- Be confident and be willing to take risks. We tend to overthink and be too cautious, and when we get an opportunity, we just need to take it. Don't be fearful of making mistakes; you will learn so much more from them.

GET OVER YOUR FEAR AND GO AND DO IT. PUT YOURSELF OUT OF YOUR COMFORT ZONE AND TAKE THAT LEAP INTO THE NEXT UNKNOWN AND BE PREPARED TO FAIL AT IT.

- Be bold, be brave about what you want to do.
- Don't be afraid to take risks.

- You have to take risks. You have to be prepared to move company to get what you want and you have to be prepared that your next company might not work out for you.

WHATEVER YOU ARE SECRETLY THINKING INSIDE - DO IT.

- Put yourself out there - in situations you find challenging and work through it.

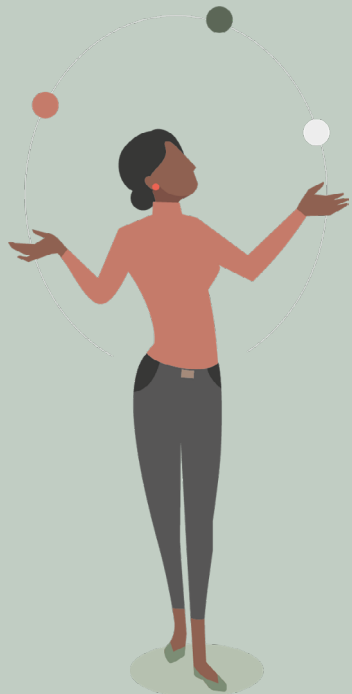
“

*Don't be scared in situations where you don't feel comfortable and have frank conversations. Be honest about how you are feeling and what the issue is.*

- Set goals and be clear when they are not met and move forward with another company.

IF YOU THINK YOU'RE NOT ABLE TO DO YOUR BEST WORK THEN LOOK FOR OTHER OPPORTUNITIES OUTSIDE THE FIRM OR, IF BIG ENOUGH, INSIDE. YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE UNHAPPY; THERE IS ALWAYS ANOTHER OPTION.

- If it doesn't happen, don't be scared to change jobs.
- Get out of your comfort zone and do things outside of your office. You can't rely on the office environment to develop yourself.



# COMMUNICATE



Self-advocacy is often an area outside the mid-level female's comfort zone, and studies show that when women self-silence, there is a high correlation of them opting out of leadership. Women notice their male peers speaking up sooner and, only then, realise that they themselves are not speaking out soon enough.

- Keep talking to people even if you have a busy project.
- Talk to as many different people about how to progress and don't rely on your efforts getting noticed without speaking about your efforts. The impulse is to say "I'm going to do the best job I can" and that will take care of things, and unfortunately that won't take care of things.
- Get used to speaking out as much as you can within a meeting.
- Sketch the plan with your line manager on how to grow within your field.
- Always talk to your managers/directors if you feel that something is not right. Communication is important.
- Ask for what you want.
- You have to start speaking and thinking like the people above you and the clients. Speak the language of your bosses and clients. Not emulating them, just being able to speak their language.
- Always asks questions - don't be afraid to be vulnerable.
- Don't be afraid to ask questions.



*Make sure people know who you are and what you have to offer. Don't sit in the background and let people take you for granted.*

ASK TO BE INVOLVED, DON'T JUST WAIT FOR IT TO BE GIVEN.

- Don't be afraid to ask for money.
- Start asking for things that you want.

YOU NEED TO BROADEN YOUR KNOWLEDGE TO SPEAK WITH AUTHORITY AND INTEREST.



ASK MANAGERS HARD QUESTIONS. UNTIL MANAGERS GET ASKED THE HARD QUESTIONS, THEY ARE NOT GOING TO LEARN TO CHANGE THINGS.



# BE AND DO



These quotes from mid-level female architects cover how to become an all-rounder and an expert in your field.

“

*Be critical - not accepting of everything that is thrown your way.*

- Be spontaneous.
- In general, stand up for yourself.

AVOID THINKING THAT YOU NEED TO PROVE YOURSELF - ADJUST YOUR ATTITUDE.

LEARN TO PAT YOURSELF ON THE BACK.

- Even finishing a degree is difficult enough these days. It doesn't pave the way for an easy rewarding, lucrative career. There can be a stark difference from when you are starting out to what you end up doing in an architectural practice. So, it's good to acknowledge our accomplishments, as that propels you to do more.

- Believe in yourself more.
- Be extremely self-motivated and self-confident.
- Think beyond your scope.



# THE PRACTICE

- Look at how a practice is structured and set up - are women at the top level? You might think that you can bring change and break the glass ceiling, but not always. It can be soul defeating and eating up of your energy reserves that could be better put to use elsewhere. Be selective about who you work for. Find women to be your role models in there.

IT'S REALLY IMPORTANT TO GET YOURSELVES SKILLED UP ABOUT THE CLIMATE CRISIS AND MAKE SOME DECISIONS ABOUT THAT.

THINK ABOUT WHERE YOUR MORALS LIE.

- You need to broaden your knowledge to speak with authority and interest. Lean-in, sit at every table, get in on every meeting.
- Industry changes all the time - be light on your feet.

“

*Don't let children stop you - you will become massively efficient.*

# SLEEPINGGIANT CONSULTING

KAREN FUGLE

Karen Fugle is an Executive Coach and LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® facilitator who has more than 20 years of experience in the Architectural industry. Karen founded SleepingGiant Consulting in 2014 after a successful career as a leading UK CAD/BIM consultant, and she has been supporting the careers of architects, designers and construction professionals ever since.

Karen elevates her client's ability with results-oriented coaching achieved through clear, actionable planning. She has a strong work ethic, manifested in high standards, clarity of approach and simplicity of delivery.

Karen is an accredited Professional Certified Coach (PCC) with the International Coach Federation, a

member of the National Council of Psychotherapists and is a certified facilitator of the LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® method and materials. Karen is a committee member of the Women in Architecture network and also a trusted writer of post-session notes for worldwide attendees of the World Business and Executive Coach Summit (WBECS).

Karen offers bespoke solutions to enhance the personal and professional performance of your employees:

- 1:1 Executive Coaching
- Group Coaching
- Workshops, including LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY®



“

*I love working with people and am passionate about personal development that can have a positive and quantifiable impact on the running of businesses at every conceivable level.*

## WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP GROUP COACHING

Improve your career performance through a cycle of reflection, new thinking, planning and action with Leadership Group Coaching. With all the benefits of 1:1 executive coaching, group coaching gives you the additional benefits of peer-to-peer support, advice and accountability in a Coach-led environment. Plus, group coaching allows your employer to reach greater numbers, cost-effectively, maximising the impact and return on investment.

- Clarify your personal and organisational goals
- Gain insight, advice and support from your peers
- Address specific issues that are impacting your performance levels
- Have support and accountability to help drive performance and remove barriers
- Enhance your ability to respond to challenges and opportunities and become more resilient
- Improve communication across the group, office and with external stakeholders

## CONTACT

M: 07762 811703

karen@sleepinggiant-consulting.com

www.sleepinggiant-consulting.com

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/karenfugle/>



SLEEPINGGIANT

CONSULTING