

NCARB Live: Architecture Career Tips

Date: January 15, 2015 at 3 p.m. EST

Topic: Preparing for an interview, negotiating your salary, making the most of your internship, and more.

Moderator: NCARB Content Producer Samantha Miller

Panelists: Robert Holzbach, AIA, LEED AP, Associate Principal and Director of Staff Operations with Hickok Cole Architects; Tyler Ashworth, AIA, LEED AP^{BD+C} of VOA; and Kimberly Tuttle, AIA, NCARB, NCARB Outreach Manager.

Samantha: Hi everyone, and welcome to NCARB Live! I'm Samantha Miller, and I have three very special guests today. We have Robert Holzbach of Hickok Cole Architects, Tyler Ashworth of VOA, and NCARB's Outreach Manager Kimberly Tuttle. Today we'll be sharing tips about a profession in architecture. Specifically, how to prepare for an interview, how to negotiate your salary, and how to make the most of your internship. At the end we'll have time to answer your questions. So if you have any, feel free to submit them during the webinar using the Q&A tool on your screen.

So to kick things off, could each of you tell us a bit about yourselves and what you do every day? Rob?

Rob: My name's Rob Holzbach. I'm with Hickok Cole Architects. I've been practicing for about 20 years now and my primary responsibility—aside from project work, which I have a full load of—is to do all the hiring and staffing management for my firm, which I've been doing for eight years now. I work on commercial office buildings, multifamily residential projects, and I've done commercial interiors in the past. The point in saying that, the fact that I'm doing both hiring and projects, is that I'm really busy. And a lot of the other people that you're going to be interviewing with and sending resumes to are equally as busy, and that's going to play into a lot of what we talk about later on.

Samantha: Okay, thanks. Tyler?

Tyler: My name's Tyler Ashworth. (I'm) Currently working as an architect in DC, just recently licensed. (I) Have about five years experience now with VOA Associates, which is a design-based international firm with nine offices total. We specialize in workplace interiors, healthcare, and proton therapy, as well as commercial repositioning. I also have quite a bit of a volunteer background, which I think is what really brings me here today. (I) Previously served as the [AIAS](#) national president, which is what brought me to DC in the first place, and have been pretty well involved with all the other collateral organizations.

Samantha: Thanks. Kim?

Kimberly: My name's Kimberly Tuttle. I have about eight to 10 years of experience in high-end residential, mostly in Maine where I actually joined the AIA Board of Directors for a couple of years. [They] introduced me to the IDP coordinators role, which you guys know now as the [Architect Licensing Advisors](#). Which actually led to my position here at NCARB as the Outreach Manager. I travel around the country talking to students to educate them on the path to licensure, but also hoping that maybe my experiences will help them out when talking with them.

Samantha: Thanks, and thank you all for joining us today. I thought we'd start at the beginning. What are some good places to look for architecture internships and jobs? Tyler?

Tyler: Yeah, the first place I always go, my go-to tool, is the [AIA Career Center](#), the national career center, I should say. AIA also has their own [career center](#) online. Then the other tool I use is just my own personal network, so putting out my feelers to colleagues I know or people that I've served with on different organizations to see if they have friends or colleagues that are looking to hire.

Kimberly: Yeah, the AIA website tends to be really good for job openings. I got on the mailing list, so even though I wasn't looking for a job, I was using it to help others. If I knew of someone who's looking, I would send something their way or just keep up with what's going on. Really, networking. I got my first job due to an alumni and that same alumni brought me into my second job, which then led me into the AIA which then led me into meeting NCARB and networking and finally here. Networking is really going to be your strongest resource in this profession because it's a small profession. We all talk, we all get to know each other, and I think Rob will cover that a little later, too.

Rob: Actually I can cover it right now, in fact. The first thing that we do when we're looking to hire is (ask) how do we find good people? We ask people we know already for references. I'll send an email to my office saying, "Hey, do you know anybody you'd like to work with?" Some people that are not happy where they are, let's see if we can get them in here for an interview. That's the first thing we do.

Next thing we do is we advertise on websites, in the [AIA DC](#), as well as national websites we'll advertise on. We also go to the architecture blogs like [Architizer](#), [Archinect](#), we'll post there and even in [Indeed.com](#), we'll post on those websites.

Samantha: Awesome. Rob, as the director of staff operations, what are some of the qualities that your firm looks for in a potential candidate?

Rob: I think it's going to vary depending on the firm that's looking. For us, we're definitely looking for design talent. We're looking for technical capability and collaborative skills. What we mean by that is somebody who's willing to give and take ideas and willing to have their ideas not accepted as long as there's a discussion about it.

Lastly, we're looking for a cultural fit, somebody that will be a good part of our firm. And that's just as important as everything else, but the biggest thing, and I think this goes for any firm, is you're looking for people who can become critically engaged in their tasks. Somebody who's thinking about why they're doing something as much as how to do the task because then they can add value to the project beyond just what's expected of them. And it's those people who become critically engaged in their work that end up being the most successful in their careers and that's what we really look for.

Tyler: Yeah, and Rob said something I wanted to highlight or rearticulate is that I hear from a lot of recent graduates or students that are still in school asking the same advice. What can they do to prepare for that interview? What skills can set them apart? Really what I tell them is it's just as much personality as it is skills, so going into that interview and selling yourself as a person.

I got my first internship in school as a second-year student with really no technical skills under my belt, but it was really just based on my personality. I went in as a confident, happy person and they saw someone they wanted to work with. Someone that would learn the skills, but someone that they knew they could work with and trust.

Kimberly: Yeah, I think that's really important. I've been on both sides of that where I haven't had a really fantastic, positive experience because I didn't have the self confidence. But when I worked more and gained more experience, my confidence level grew a lot and that definitely made a difference when I was interviewing.

You really have to be at the point where when you're walking out of an interview, you have to be okay that maybe that's not the job for you. Maybe that's not the firm for you, and that has to be okay. You have to be all right to just walk away. I think that's the biggest thing. Put yourself out there.

Rob: Can I add to that the notion that you're going to walk away but not forget about them, because once you've interviewed with them, they know who you are and they might actually want you to be one of their employees, so now they're part of your network. You might not want them now, but in two years they might be the perfect fit for you. So once you have that interview, maintain those contacts. It all goes back to the network and that they're now part of your network.

Kimberly: And always send a thank you note.

Rob: Yeah.

Samantha: Rob, let's say there's an open position. How many resumes might you sift through?

Rob: We'll get hundreds of resumes for a position, and we have multiple positions open, so multiply that. It becomes a challenge, so what happens is, and you've probably heard this before but it's true, you literally have 30 seconds for your resume to get you the interview. And the best thing that you can do with your resume is send in a series of work samples or teaser pages that allow us to get a good gauge of what project types you've worked on and the skills that you have to have to offer.

Samantha: What makes these work samples stand out?

Rob: It's basically eye candy. You have to look at it like that. It's something that's going to attract our attention and say, "Yeah, wow, this is great. We want this person." It's great renderings. It's maybe some sketches. Hand sketches are fantastic. If you have a good conceptual sketch that you can include, that's going to really stand out as well.

Tyler: I think that it's important to add that it's not the whole portfolio at that point, right? The portfolio is something that they might ask for while you're filling out that application or in that process of trying to get to the interview. Send in the work samples, leave the portfolio for later. Keep it limited. Be careful about what you include. Show your best work in those work samples and try not to just send everything up front.

Kimberly: Yeah, and then it goes back to what you end up bringing in too. What does that end portfolio look like, and we had talked earlier that it shouldn't be digital. Rob's seen a few instances.

Rob: I think the best way to approach the interview and the [portfolio](#) is that this is a way you're going to show off your work and so it's a tool for you to tell stories with. And if you come in with an iPad or a laptop, it's very hard for many people to see it at one time. I think I even had a person come in with an iPad mini, which is almost the smallest platform you can imagine except an iPhone, which I wouldn't be surprised if somebody tried to do that, too. I really recommend large printed sheets because it's much easier for people to see, plus you can avoid any potential technical difficulties.

Kimberly: I've gone in with an entire stack of drawings from projects and then employers can flip through and you can point out what you've done and why you've done them, maybe some things you've learned.

Rob: A half-sized set of CDs is a great thing to bring along because you can flip it open to a sheet and show the building sections that you worked on, some of the details. That's fantastic, and you were talking about it doesn't have to be such a high-end design.

Tyler: To me, my portfolio wasn't even the most used tool at my last interview. It was that half-size set that I brought in and that was the story that I was walking them through and showing them what I had worked on in that project, what I had learned. The portfolio was this quick eye candy that got passed around, and I had a couple different copies of them.

What I always tell students or recent graduates, (is) don't get so caught up in that graphic design. Every line doesn't have to be measured and perfect in the portfolio. Your work should show and be quality work, but you don't need to spend those hours and days and weeks and months agonizing over what's this perfect portfolio. It's just like a resume, they're going to flip through it pretty dang quick.

Rob: Simple, clean, easy to read. For resume and portfolio, that's the mantra. Don't overdo it because it's all about you and the way you use it to tell stories. I know we're diving into portfolios right now, but the best way for you to get across the skills you have to offer is to tell stories during the interview process.

There's a great example of a woman who had an Army barrack in her portfolio, and she flipped the page and she said, "I have an Army barrack here. It's not that interesting, except here's why it's interesting to you," and she went on and told me a story about how during the construction of these Army barracks she faced all these challenges because she didn't do the CDs.

What I learned from her was her ability to overcome these obstacles and work with the contractor and forge these alliances to get the project done. So even though her portfolio had Army barracks, I realized at that point in time that's a person I want to hire.

Samantha: That's great. Let's step back a bit. Before you get to the interview, what are some things that you can do to prepare for the big day?

Tyler: I think researching the firm. Certainly every interview I walk into or every application I send out, I even start before the interview, I'm going through every page on their website and figuring out who the principals in charge are, what their backgrounds are, what market sectors that firm is working in, and oftentimes I'll even take a step back and maybe rearrange my resume based on those market sectors.

If I'm getting ready to send in an application for a firm that does all housing, I don't want to show them that I've worked on only libraries or some other project type, so I'm going to maybe reorganize my resume and my cover letter a little bit. Taking those steps to come in and be ready to talk about the firm during the interview, you have to do your research and know ahead of time who you're going to talk to and knowing you want to work there as well, and that's going to show them you want to work there.

Rob: It is totally appropriate to send an email to ask who you're going to interview with.

Tyler: Exactly, because another thing I've done as well is finding out more about those people, looking them up on LinkedIn or elsewhere on the Internet, and then you can find out maybe that the principal at that firm went to the same school you did, so you already have something in common. That makes you that much more memorable during the interview when you can say, "Oh, you went to here as well."

Kimberly: For me, my experiences have always been very small firms, probably 12 people max. But for me going into some of my job interviews, yes, be prepared, giving yourself that self confidence and getting psyched for that interview, but also learning maybe what they could use help in. Knowing that, "Oh, I've got some Photoshop skills. You guys are doing marketing. Maybe I can help you out with your marketing," and figure out ways that you can be an asset and sell yourself to that firm in different ways than just your architecture skills.

Robert: That's great.

Samantha: You had mentioned that you worked at a small firm previously, so are there differences in preparing for an interview at a small firm versus a larger firm?

Kimberly: I'm not sure that there are too many differences. An interview is an interview, and I think they're pretty common throughout the profession. But that is really one thing that I did look at. I knew that they were trying to launch a new website and I knew, "Oh, I know a little bit of WordPress. Let me see if I can help you with this" or "I see you're trying to get into marketing" or I heard what they were trying to do. I don't know, maybe a restaurant and so I flipped to that page and I said, "Hey look, I have a little bit of experience. I was just still a year out of school when I did this, but I understand this. This is how I can help you," and those are ways that you can interact with them.

Rob: It all goes to research and being prepared for the interview, so it doesn't necessarily matter if it's a big or small firm. It's just who are they and how can you help them.

Tyler: Yeah, the interview's going to stay the same, but the difference between the size of the firm might inform some of the questions you ask during the interview or how you prepare for it.

Samantha: Another important takeaway is that you are interviewing the firm as much as they're interviewing you.

Rob: It's true. Can I speak to that? As the person who's doing the interviews, I like it when people come and they are asking me questions about my firm because it shows that they're engaged. They want to be part of what we're doing. They want to learn about us and that they value themselves enough to try and make sure that we're a good fit for them, because we're certainly trying to make sure they're a good fit for us, so I think that's fantastic.

Tyler: I've been in situations where I've needed a job and then I've been in situations where I could take it or leave it, and that is probably the best situation you can ever be in because you go in there knowing if this doesn't work out, it's fine. I love my job as it is and if this works out, fantastic. I know that's a hard spot to be in, but it is the most wonderful spot when you're interviewing for a job. Either way it comes out would be the best of both worlds.

Samantha: We had spoken earlier a bit about going in there, I think Tyler you spoke to this, and having the confidence to sell yourself and your skills and what you can do for that firm. Let's say you're not in a position where you can take it or leave it. How can you leave that behind? That, "Okay, if I don't get this job, I'm not going to be able to pay rent this month." What are some tips to help exude that confidence and really show that you are the perfect candidate for this position?

Tyler: Hopefully it's not a matter of rent. That would be unfortunate. I think with any interview, anytime you're going after a job or you're trying to be successful at something like this, it's a little bit of a mental game. You have to psyche yourself out beforehand and see the goal at the end. It's like sports. You see yourself hitting the ball with the bat and then it happens. When you prepare for that interview, you have to, like you said, set that stuff aside, convince yourself that you're the one for it, and get your positivity up, your confidence up, and really just go in there ready to show your best self.

I think the biggest mistake I made in an interview once, and I found this out after that firm called my reference, and his feedback to me was, "We really liked Tyler as a candidate, but we didn't see any of his sense of wanting to change the world or all this volunteerism that he does." Because that was what my reference had to say about me and they said, "We didn't get that. All we got was his interest in production and these things." After hearing that, I realized I never really told them who I was. I jumped right into the architecture stuff.

It's important, like we were talking about earlier, to take that minute when they say, "Tell us a little bit about yourself." That's your spotlight. That's your chance to be onstage, to be excited, smile, be who you are, and show that personality and hopefully, like we were saying, it's the personality that they're going after.

Kimberly: Part of being prepared is really knowing what your strengths and weaknesses are. For me, one of my interviews I definitely had a lack of self-confidence, I really did. I didn't realize that until they called my references and they expressed that. I was like, wow, I didn't realize that was coming across, so for future interviews I definitely made sure I had that in check.

My confidence grew as everyone's will when they start working and they get used to what they're doing and get more involved. But knowing that, I was much more aware of that in future interviews because you don't want to put that out there. You just want to make sure you know what you're putting out there when you are interviewing.

Rob: Something that helps you to gain confidence is the notion of hopefully, before you actually start looking for a job, is you really sit down and think about who you are and what you want. What's my skill set, what do I have to offer, and what do I want out of my career? Then you can target the firms that you're looking for. You can craft your resume for that, and you can also craft your portfolio so that your portfolio is a tool to help you express those things.

If you're talking about yourself, about your personal goals, your aspirations, and what you can offer, then you're coming from a point of confidence because you're just talking about yourself. You're not necessarily coming in saying, "God I need this job so badly." You can just say, "This is who I am, this is what I have to offer you," and it comes from the heart. It comes across to the employer so much more than the sense of like, "Oh my gosh, I really need this job. Please hire me."

Also, I would note that the portfolio really just sits on the table as a tool for you to use. It's mostly about conversation because we're not hiring a set of skills. We're not just hiring somebody who can do Revit, somebody who can design and do Photoshop. What we're looking for is the person. We're interviewing the person, not the skill sets. If you understand who you are and what you want, you can get that across more clearly and it really is effective in the interview.

Tyler: I think the important thing about the notion of who you are and what you want and prepping yourself ahead of time is it helps you answer those questions that you're unprepared for. The question you don't have that answer for, you can tie it back into yourself and your own skill sets if you have that self-confidence and you've prepped yourself for, again, how you're selling yourself, who you are beforehand.

Rob: Exactly right.

Samantha: So I think we've all had that question, "Tell me about your weaknesses." How can you put a positive spin on that question or a similar question, because it's bound to happen to everyone?

Rob: I don't think it's necessarily a great interview question, but it does happen and I've had to answer it myself, and I think the thing you need to do is always stay positive. You certainly don't want to give your deepest, darkest secrets, but anything that you do say should be in a positive light.

For instance, one of the answers I've given in the past was that I'm really motivated and I tend to take on a lot more responsibility than I can often handle, so it took me a long time before I could learn that I have to slow down or find a way to delegate that responsibility. I'm talking about a weakness, but I'm showing it as a positive point in the profession or it's a weakness or mistake that you made and you tell the story of how you overcame that. That's the best way to handle that sort of question.

Tyler: I think another simple answer that we were discussing earlier, especially for someone out of school, (is) it's easy to say you don't want to identify a weakness or maybe you really just honestly don't feel you have one, but an easy one is just your lack of experience. That's something that's very simple. It's very honest and is just saying, "I'm talented, I have these skill sets, but I don't have the years under my belt. I'm fresh into the architecture profession. I'm going to build on that and experience will grow with time."

Kimberly: That's really how you guys can use IDP to your advantage because you can talk about, "I've got a lot of CDs. I have a lot of hours in CDs, but I feel like I don't have enough experience with my design development, DD. I don't have a lot of hours in DDs, and I feel like I could really use some work on getting more experience and really raising my awareness of how I work and things I need to learn in that field."

That's really where you can take advantage of using IDP as one of those questions that, like Rob said, he loves it when you guys come in with a list of questions. Have that be on there. Talk about your experiences and how you can use those experiences to help the firm, but then also to show them that you want to learn and move forward with your career.

Rob: IDP's a great framework for that. That's the intention.

Samantha: That's actually a great segue. I wanted to talk about the kinds of questions you can ask during an interview to ensure that this firm is going to support your career goals, support you getting those IDP hours, support your path to licensure. What kinds of questions can you ask during the interview?

Kimberly: IDP and ARE, fantastic questions. I usually tell students when I'm on the road, like Rob said, having a list of questions is key. I've been one of them. I've been in interviews and people are like, "Do you have any questions for us?" And I've been just blank, so writing them down is really great and starting off with IDP and ARE are really, really good because it shows your employer that you want to develop your career. You want to become licensed and move down that professional path.

Other things you can ask, even in regards to the ARE, is what kind of help do you offer taking the AREs? Do you offer reimbursement? Do you have study materials? Do you have prep series? I hear some firms have a lot of great resources for interns going through the path, so that right there is a great question to start off and ask how the firm can help you in your professional growth.

Tyler: Another important thing is knowing the position that you're there interviewing for and what that description looks like, but also maybe looking ahead and knowing what that next step might be down the road and simply asking that question, "I know I'm coming in for this. What are the steps that I could take or that you could help me with to get me to that next level?"

Sometimes it may come off as eager or a little too ambitious, but certainly just letting someone know that you're interested in your own professional growth and you don't just want to be a drafts person forever. Asking those questions, leading, looking for the opportunists with your oral review to go over that with your supervisors and figure out what those next steps are to get you to that next level.

Rob: Those are great, and in fact we want people to be interested in their own career development. If somebody doesn't really worry about that then it's probably not somebody we want to hire. But also it's something that we're looking for—people who want to become part of our firm and help build the future of our firm. People who ask questions about where is our firm going, where do we see ourselves in the next three to five years are great too because you're interviewing the firm as much as they're interviewing you.

If you are trying to gauge where that firm is going, it shows a lot of interest. Also it's good for you to know are they heading in the direction that I want to be in.

Samantha: That's great. Let's say this is your first job and you don't have much experience under your belt. What can you do to get a leg up on other candidates? Tyler?

Tyler: Sure, so I get the first job, you don't have all that experience under your belt. Getting the leg up on the other candidates, for me, what has been at the top of my resume always is my volunteer experience, my involvement through the AIAS, now the NAAB Visiting Board. That's where I find my energy in my profession. It's how I recharge my batteries outside of the office, and that also helps me to develop a network.

Like we were talking about earlier, it's those connections that might lead you to your next job. That's certainly one way. Then you can use, again, your local AIA chapter to go to different skill seminars or ARE classes. I think being involved for me is the one way.

Kimberly: I just have to piggyback off of that. Networking, from my experience, that's how I've gotten all of my jobs, so I cannot knock that at all. Extra curricular activities, you never know who you're going to meet. I was in a singing group and there was a seasoned, really well-known architect in that group. You get to network and you get to meet them in different ways and you never know when that next job opportunity's going to come up. You might be on the top of their minds when they're thinking about you.

Tyler: I do want to add as well, credentialing is an important thing. Obviously probably a lot of the people watching right now are working toward licensure with IDP or ARE, but just as much as you've been having that on your resume or having that conversation, it's something you might think is obvious, that everyone's working toward that. But I've talked to employers that they want to hear that during the interview as opposed to someone they might just assume is going to go into that job and maybe licensure is five years down the road for them. Even if you don't have something done, saying you're part of the way through or I've passed two exams and I'm in the process, that shows them a level of commitment that I think a lot of employers want to see.

Kimberly: Can I add to that real quick? Like I said with the singing group, you never know what you might have in common with someone. And like Rob said, they're not just hiring for your skills, they're hiring people. We all spend 40 hours a week. We pretty much live with these people that we work with, so you want to be able to get along with them. My last boss was a huge hockey fan so every time he couldn't go to a game, I would get his tickets. We have that to talk about. You just never know when you're going to be able to connect with someone and have an opportunity to engage with them.

Rob: That's great. That's actually a really good point.

Samantha: Keep an open mind.

Tyler: Yeah.

Samantha: At what point in the interview process is it appropriate to ask about salary? This is a question that we've received several times via email before the webinar so I want to make sure that we got to that question. So, Rob?

Rob: Never, never. Not until they bring it up. Let them lead the discussion. Please don't come in and ask what the salary is until they bring it up. That's a door opening. Still follow their lead, but again, you're interviewing them so you do need information.

For instance, if the discussions occur, do ask about whether they contribute to 401k, do ask about their leave, healthcare plans, but again, follow their lead. Don't push too far in that especially in the first interview, but later on if you have a second interview or a salary negotiation, absolutely it's open season then.

Tyler: You want to let them ask you first. Certainly those things are going to be on the table, but when they've asked you what you need to make or what your salary range is, then you know they're interested in you and again like you said, that door's opened up and you can start having those conversations.

Kimberly: I think there are some good resources for gauging what that gap range is.

Rob: The AIA National has a [compensation survey](#) that they do every two years, and obviously as a firm, that's the only thing that we use as our gauge aside from what we're able to glean from other firms. But we really don't have that much information so it's really the AIA compensation survey that we use.

Tyler: And that's an important tool for those who can get access to it. When you are trying to figure out what your worth is, you can use that. And it's broken down by region, by city, by experience level, medium, high, and low, as well as your position. You can figure out, I'm a zero to three year architect in terms of my experience in the DC area and then you can go right to that chart and see approximately this range of what you might be worth, then that helps you when they ask what's your range or what do you need to make. Then you're not asking outside of your range or giving them some astronomical figure that they're just going to dismiss you entirely.

Samantha: We've been on a very positive note. I'm going to switch gears a bit. What is the worst thing you can do during an interview? Rob?

Rob: The very worst thing? There are so many bad things that you could possibly do in an interview.

Tyler: No pressure.

Rob: Yeah, so there's no pressure at all on you. I thought about this a lot and I think the worst thing you can do is be unprofessional, and there are several things that fall under that category. One is not being dressed appropriately which we discussed earlier, but it's not being on time, your behavior, are you using foul language, those kind of things come thorough and that's a big mistake.

I think the biggest thing that's unprofessional is being negative either about yourself, about people you've worked with, or your previous employer. That is a big mistake. You should always stay positive as much as you can and spin even the negative into a positive if you can.

Tyler: Yeah, and so speaking of spinning negatives into positives, I would say the biggest mistake you can make, again I'm thinking back to that one interview where I didn't tell them who I was. I think it's missing that opportunity to make an impression. That everything you're there to do is to make an impression, to leave them something to remember you by.

Hopefully a week later or two weeks later when they're coming ready to make that decision or maybe even a year later when they have a new job, you're still on their mind and they say, "Oh, I remember Tyler. He was the guy that was really about sustainability" or whatever it might be. You leave that impression and then it gives them an opportunity to come back and hopefully hire you.

Kimberly: I think really what Rob was saying about coming across professional is that when you end up eventually getting hired by that firm, you want to come across in that interview the way you would come across with a client. They want to make sure that you can come across with a client and really show what the firm is about, because you are representing the firm at that point, so if you put that first foot forward then you're likely to follow up.

Samantha: Now we have time to answer your questions, so again if you have any, feel free to submit them using the Q&A tool on your screen. Our first question comes from Tiffany. "Do you have any interview tips for someone who's coming back to the profession after several years as a stay-at-home mom?" It's a great question.

Tyler: That is a great question. I have a friend actually that was coming back into the profession not as a stay-at-home mom, but after being laid off in the recession previously. And that was a big hang-up for her because she then had this gap in her resume that was filled with retail experience and other random experiences that were fairly not architecture related, a little bit far flung.

Really my advice to her was just go in on the experience that she did have and simply acknowledging that the gap was there for a reason. Here was what she was doing. Again, it came back to confidence. It was stepping back into an office for an interview and saying, "Yeah, the recession came along. Things weren't going so great. I stayed busy with these things, but now it's architecture. This is what I want to do again." It might not be the ideal piece of advice, but the only thing you have to build upon is your experience.

If you did have experiences related to architecture, certainly there's a way you can package those and spin those in a light that might apply to that new potential employer. You might've been doing furniture design or something for a case goods manufacturer. That's something that's still relevant and something worth talking about.

Kimberly: Yeah, just staying positive and using whatever you can. I wasn't laid off but I do have a whole bunch of different work experiences. I worked for supermarkets. I've worked for film companies. Using the customer service aspect of that and knowing how to talk to people and have relationships, so selling those points that you can learn in different jobs, using those and selling yourself on that.

Rob: I would assume that you're acknowledging that your years of experience don't match your years out of school, so I think that's a big thing is to acknowledge that. Let's say you worked for two years then you became a stay-at-home mom, so you're basically a two-year person to the employer. Now the profession has moved on in terms of technology. Likely the firm is in Revit now and you might not know Revit, so I think a big thing for you to help with the interview and just with your whole job search is to go out and to actually take a class in Revit.

Understand what is the current technology, what's the current knowledge base, and making an effort on your own to learn those things. If you can come into the interview saying yes, I'm doing these things to get caught up, that's going to go a long way.

Tyler: I do want to add to that, actually. For someone that maybe is in that boat and say hasn't had a successful interview, if you feel comfortable doing so with that firm that you're interviewing with, say you have an unsuccessful interview, asking them to figure out what would it take for you to be hired by them, the reason they didn't hire you, essentially.

It could be Revit, so then you find out, you know what, I do need to go work on my Revit skills, take a course or get a certificate. It could be something else entirely, but it never hurts to ask. They might tell you, you know what, they just don't feel comfortable telling you. As with anything, it's their own personal opinion. It's the firm's opinion, so don't let that crush you too if it's something that may be negative just against you in general.

Samantha: That's great advice. Thanks, guys. "What would you say should be the focus for students who are coming out of school?" I think this candidate is concerned about the gap perhaps between some of the classes she's taking and real-world experience.

Kimberly: I guess just trying to make your portfolio as strong as possible and highlighting your strengths in your portfolio when you're creating that. Highlighting the projects that you really feel passionate about and can speak strongly to—why you made some of the design decisions you did and stuff like that.

Tyler: Yeah, it sounded again like gaps and maybe technology gaps, so again this goes back to Revit and some other things. I found myself in that same boat. They were similar when I got out of school. It was right in that transition between CAD and Revit so the courses we had in school were all CAD. I had zero Revit experience and now I was finding myself interviewing in front of firms that were looking for that experience, so the best I could do without lying, was a little bit fake it.

I had certainly touched the software before and had been in Revit before but I haven't done it in a production environment, so how could I sell that and again sell myself as someone that was hardworking, a quick learner? I found a firm that was maybe willing to take a chance on me as someone who didn't have that full experience. And I picked it up really quick, so I think it's just a matter of, again, that kind of confidence, selling yourself for what you do know and what you do have, and then riding on faith a little bit.

Rob: Yeah, I think it's important too to know that the employers know that you don't have a lot of skills in the profession yet because you're fresh out of school. You may have great graphics skills, you may have great modeling skills, but you can't put together a set of drawings and so we know that and we acknowledge that. I think the best thing to do is highlight the strengths you do have and talk about your goals and your eagerness to develop in the future. I think that's really the best thing that you can do for yourself.

Kimberly: I think, just for a little plug, on top of that we have the [Emerging Professionals Companion](#). So if you know that a firm is really into sustainability, you'll find the associated *Emerging Professionals Companion* that goes with that. Read it, do the activity, take the initiative, and then you can use that as a selling point when you're in your interview.

Samantha: And earn IDP credit. Karla would like to know if a thank you note by email is okay?

Rob: Yes, it's fine. A thank you note by hand is great, email is perfectly appropriate. This is my point of view.

Tyler: What I try to do actually, if it's that same day and if I was in a job and going to an interview in that situation where I really don't need it which is ideal, try and send a follow up email that same day. Just a quick note and thank you, and then follow up within a week with a thank you card. Either or, both are great but certainly you do want to at least provide that follow up again so your name is fresh in their head.

Rob: Actually can I jump on to that? Maintaining contact, too. It's not just a thank you note or an email and then wait to hear back from them. If, for instance, during an interview you discuss a particular architect that they like or that you like or you see an article about their firm, send a link to that article or that architect's website to that person maybe three weeks later and say, "Hey, I saw this. This reminded me of the interview. Hope you're doing well." It's a great way to stay in contact without saying, "Hey, are you going to offer me a job?" It's a really smart way to stay in contact.

Kimberly: You said something about that too, about applying to firms and the reference versus cold calling, and even if a firm's not hiring, still send in your resume.

Robert: Oh, absolutely. If you know who you are and know what you want, you're going to target the firm you want to work for. You're going to send your resume to that firm even if they're not hiring because chances are they're still interviewing. If you can get in that interview, as soon as they know they need to hire, they're going to go to that list of people they've already interviewed and you've got a job offer before they've even advertised.

Samantha: Apparently our panelists are architects *and* psychics, because our next question comes from Adam who wanted to know how effective a cold call is for responding to a position without any network connection. Is there anything else you'd like to add?

Kimberly: I haven't had much luck cold calling.

Tyler: Again, if I'm understanding the question correctly, it's a cold call regarding an ad. The first thing I would tell anyone as advice, make sure you're reading the ad fully. I have seen some ads where they don't want phone calls simply because, like you said earlier, you get hundreds of resumes for a position, possibly. If a position description goes out, they might now be getting 200 phone calls while they're simultaneously trying to manage projects, and short staffed because you haven't been hired yet.

Make sure a call is welcome firsthand, but yeah, then I think certainly if we're talking about a shotgun approach here, there are positions open, you might not have a reference there. First try and find a reference. LinkedIn again is a great tool for that. You might find there's a friend of a friend, someone who knows someone at that firm that you can get some sort of an in, and that's a name you can drop in your cover letter.

Otherwise, people still do get jobs without references, so it doesn't hurt to put that out there. Do the research though. Talk about that firm and their projects in your cover letter and maybe tailor your resume to that firm.

Rob: Definitely send the resume out. I'm not so certain about calling, even if the ad doesn't say don't call. I prefer not to get phone calls. I'm probably honestly not going to return it and I probably won't take it, either. It's nothing against everyone that's applying. It's just I simply can't do it. I don't have the time.

If you do decide to call and you get a voicemail, make sure you know exactly what you're going to say when that beep goes off because you can ruin any chance you have by having a long, rambling voicemail message. Absolutely ruin your chances.

Samantha: Good to know. Can a portfolio be a combination of digital and print?

Rob: Yes. I think as long as the digital portfolio is something that's accessible. If it's an iPad, make sure that you pass it around, but I'd rather see the print version. When I say digital, if by digital you mean a portfolio that's on the Internet, that's great but don't expect that the employers are going to have a way for you to access the Internet to show your portfolio online.

Tyler: I think the way I was reading that, or hearing that question rather, what I do, I'll send my cover letter, resume, work samples, just a couple of sheets. On top of all of those sheets, it's the very same consistent my name and contact information, but then I have my personal website and that has my portfolio.

If I'm following up to a job by reference, by email, or something like that, I might send them all of that stuff and then I'll say, "Oh by the way, here's a link to the specific page on my website with the portfolio or the project types that you do, so here's my housing experience." Everything they need is maybe attached to that email or they've already received it in print, but if they want to explore more, they have that option to click the link, check out my website.

At the actual physical interview, I'm still going in with print material only. I don't want to rely on technology.

Samantha: Do you all always bring copies of your resume?

Tyler: Multiple copies.

Kimberly: You shouldn't assume that the recruiter is going to have them printed out waiting for you.

Rob: Absolutely. Actually, in fact, I almost never come down to the interview with the resume. I leave it upstairs just to see if they bring copies. The other thing, and this is interesting, is that you can't control what happens to your resume when you send it out.

You email it out and then an administrative assistant may print it to black and white even though it's color and then make five copies of that black and white copy, so you have no control over what happens to your resume after you send it. If you come to the interview with the perfectly printed color glossy pages and hand those out, then you've actually established control again, so definitely bring copies.

Kimberly: Actually, I had a question following that. Resumes then also references. When do references come in?

Rob: Not until requested.

Kimberly: You always keep those tucked away.

Rob: Please, yes. For your own benefit. A lot of people have their references listed on their resume, but then again that's information that you're giving out there that you can't control. We may call the reference before we even contact you, and then the references may not know they're going to be called, so you want to control that information.

Samantha: Our next question comes from Jason. "How do you approach asking for a higher salary than what was first presented to you?"

Rob: That's a salary negotiation. It's okay to negotiate, that's the first thing. It's okay, but it needs to be respectful and professional. I think that's the most important thing is to understand that they want you now. After you've gone through this whole process, the employer wants you in their firm, so they're not going to lose you over a couple thousand dollars, probably, hopefully.

What you need to do is do your research and you need to understand it's actually based on the compensation survey, this is what a person with my years of experience in this position should be making, and then I bring these additional skills to the table, therefore I think I am worth this much money. If you come forward with a logical, respectful reason why you deserve more money, make it. And I also recommend that you do it in person if you can or on the phone. Don't just send an email back trying to negotiate by email. That's a mistake. That's too impersonal.

Tyler: I think you were starting to frame it there at the end because we were having this discussion during lunch. I think that the most important part is not just asking for it if you're going to negotiate and you want a couple extra thousand or a couple extra percent. Not just throwing that out there but giving them real specific examples or really reasons why you're worth it and what you'll contribute to the firm.

If they're going to give you this extra money in hiring you, what else are you going to bring to the table or what are you already doing that you're going to do exceptionally well, and then live up to that once you get hired. You don't want to get hired at this great rate, this high salary, and then underperform. That's not going to be good for you. It's not going to be good for your reputation and the firm's certainly not going to be happy.

Kimberly: The other thing is you should know at that point what salary is going to be offered and there may be added benefits that you didn't realize, maybe you didn't have in the job before. I know when I moved from one job to another it was only about a thousand-dollar increase, but I didn't have to drive an hour to work.

I could save \$50 a week in gas and I could just walk to work, so there were a lot of added benefits that (replaced) an increase in salary because I wasn't spending that money on the backend. Talking about health insurance and all the other added benefits could have an impact.

Rob: Actually that raises a good point, too. Another thing to think about is it's not just a salary. Firms generally have a specific range in which they're able to make an offer and if you're at the top end of that range but you still want more and deserve more, there's other ways to do it. For instance, maybe the firm could pay for your parking. Maybe the firm could give you Metro checks or public transit vouchers. These are things that have monetary value. Even maybe additional leave days. They have monetary value, but they can still say you're being paid within this range so it keeps it fair within the firm, too.

Samantha: Our next question comes from Reagan. "As a soon-to-be college grad, who should I have on my reference sheet and how often are references actually checked?"

Tyler: Yeah, just like we talked about earlier, leave them for request only. I will answer who to have and especially as a recent college grad, that's oftentimes difficult. You might not have that professional colleague to have on there. Someone that you've worked under, a supervisor. If you did have an internship in school, absolutely one or two of those people. As high up as you can get at your firm that will still give you a good reference and know your work well.

You don't want to put the firm principal on there who's, a) not going to have the time to pick up a phone to talk to that person, and b) might not have had any clue what you were doing at that firm.

Rob: Last thing you want them to say is, "Who?"

Tyler: And the obvious: no friends, no family unless they're professional references. But professors certainly don't hurt and they can speak to your work skill and work ethic.

Kimberly: Yeah, I still to this day have a professor on my reference sheet. I'm speaking from my experience. Since I didn't have a lot of work experience, I put maybe a previous job that wasn't necessarily architectural related but they could speak to my work performance, that I showed up on time, that I was reliable, all of those things. Someone that can speak to that.

Rob: You have to do the best you can do if you don't have professional work experience, so I think those are all great ideas. And yes, we check references. We absolutely do because I'm doing it honestly for my firm's benefit but for my own benefit as well. If for whatever reason an employee doesn't work out and then my boss says, "Hey, did you check the references?" And I say, "No," that's really bad. That's bad for me, but it also is bad for the firm.

Samantha: Matt would like to know how to turn down a job offer without insulting the firm and ruining your connection with them.

Tyler: That's a good question. I actually had an experience where I was fortunate enough to have three different offers on the table coming out of not having had any work, still post recession. That was tricky because I had gotten one of those offers through a reference, but it wasn't so much in the specific traditional architectural realm, so it was easier to weigh that one out.

I still had to be delicate in how to do it because it was that close colleague and friend that had gotten that connection for me to begin with, so definitely a phone call. Email, like we were just talking about earlier, is sometimes a little too impersonal. I think it's all in how you frame that conversation and letting them know that you can't take the offer.

More often than not it's going to be because you hopefully have a better offer and I think something as simple as, "I found something that's just a better fit for me." You don't have to go into all the details; you don't have to spell out all the nitty-gritty. Just, "Thank you so much for the offer. Would've really loved to have worked here and been part of the team, but found something that was a better match."

Rob: I think also just say that, "Hey, I would love to keep in touch with you. I think your firm's great and this is a better fit for me right now, but let's keep in touch." And actually do keep in touch.

Kimberly: To follow up on what Tyler was saying, you want to leave a job like that as well. When you are deciding to move on to a different firm, that's how you want to leave things. You don't want to burn bridges. You want to keep those networks and the connections fresh because you never know. Recession might happen again, you might need to go back to that firm. You never know.

Tyler: Or that person that you've worked for at that previous firm now works at the new firm that you want to get hired (at), and so that person that you just burned a bridge with is now interviewing you again.

Rob: That's true, and from my point of view, anybody that doesn't take our offer, that's somebody that they've already been vetted from us. We've already done all the work. We know this is a person we want to work with us so we're going to track that person over the course of their career and maybe in two years we'll give them a call to see how it's working out.

You definitely want to keep in touch, and anybody who's actually in charge of hiring out there, I recommend that you keep in touch with those people that have not accepted positions assuming they did it in a professional manner. I have had some people that, based on way that they declined, they were off our hire list for the future.

Samantha: What's the biggest peeve that you see during an interview?

Tyler: I think that one's for you.

Rob: Biggest pet peeve. That's hard to say. I think that goes back to the mistakes and just people that aren't professional because I think when you come in and you act professionally, that's showing respect for the employer. I guess that probably would be my biggest pet peeve.

Story, quick story. A guy came in, he was a fantastic designer. He was chewing gum, he had sunglasses on the back of his head and he was wearing flip-flops and jeans. I immediately decided I wasn't going to hire this person even though he was fantastic at what he did, so I guess you could call that a pet peeve just because it wasn't respectful.

Kimberly: Following up, dressing, figuring out how to dress and what to wear on your interview. I would strongly suggest, as Tyler has said, making sure you're being prepared and looking through the website, check out what people are wearing. Maybe they have a very casual dress code. Maybe it's business, maybe it's business casual. Always figure out what their standard of dress is and maybe take it up a notch. That way you're definitely not underdressed and you're showing how professional you are.

Tyler: I would say definitely take it up a notch. Our firm is certainly casual dress most of the week or any given day, but if there are client interviews, and that's us going out and trying to get our firm jobs, those people are all wearing suits or pantsuits for women, dresses and skirts, whatever it might be. Dress up when it matters. Once you get the job, then you can wear your jeans and whatever makes you comfortable.

Rob: I have one more, sorry. Firm handshake. Look the person in the eye and give them a firm handshake. That matters, it really does.

Samantha: We have, I think, two or three more minutes before we're going to get cut off. So before we sign off for the day, I was hoping that each of you could briefly state one takeaway from today's webinar, an important tip to take home for all our emerging professionals out there.

Rob: As I said before, knowing who you are and knowing what you want. If you're able to establish very confidently these are the skills I have to offer and this is what I'm looking for in my career, it's going to benefit you in your resumé design, your interview skills, and even negotiating to make sure that you're getting what you want out of your career.

Tyler: I think for me it really comes down to just being positive and being confident. When you walk in that interview, you have to mentally set aside all those things of the skill sets that you might not have that you're worried about. You have to go in ready to win that job. It's that mental psyching yourself before hand, but always be positive and be confident and just display your best self during that interview.

Kimberly: Definitely networking. I'm really big about networking. You never know where you're going to meet that next person. You could be sitting on an airplane talking to somebody and then realize, "Oh, hey. That's a potential job," so networking is key. Even as you move up through your career and you move up through the firm, networking is huge, in that because if you can put yourself out there, that can help the firm in the long run.

Rob: That's absolutely right.

Samantha: Great, well thank you all for joining us, and thank you for joining us. And be sure to check the blog next week because we'll be posting a video recap of today's webinar. Thanks, we'll see you next time.