

URL: <https://stvp.stanford.edu/blog/videos/lakeflato-impact-with-longevity>

How do you create physical structures that sustain both human communities and the natural environment? For architects Greg Papay and Brandi Rickels of the Texas-based firm Lake|Flato, it starts with emphasizing locally sourced, regenerative resources whenever possible. But it also means evolving their firm's culture at the right pace, so their own organization is as sustainable as the buildings they create. In broad strokes, that comes down to preserving core values while adapting to new opportunities and accelerating into occasional left turns. Papay and Rickels have found that providing strong mentorship while avoiding stiff hierarchies, finding the optimal size for project groups, and knowing when to let goals be open-ended have all helped Lake|Flato grow while keeping sight of what ultimately matters. Educators: Activate a discussion about scaling and purpose in your classroom with a Lake|Flato case study (see show notes) that explores the firm's inflection points and strategic decisions.



Transcript

(soft instrumental music) - Architecture could be a very environmentally unfriendly process if you're not careful.. It could be about extracting materials.. It could be about using energy, using water and not thinking about how you regenerate those things.. - We're drawing on regional elements.. We're not carting materials in from across the nation or across the world, that we're working with what we have.. We're trying to be a good steward of the land and the community.. (soft instrumental music) - Our goal is to have buildings be kind of a bridge between human beings and the landscape.. (soft instrumental music) Heading forward I think our biggest challenge is that our two founders will likely be retiring or diminishing dramatically the amount of work they're doing.. And they've had such a profound impact on the company from it's inception through today.. So, Brandi and I would be some kind of second generation owners..

The question is what's that next group going to bring.. Because it has to be, I think to be vibrant it has to be something new.. It can't just be extending what others have done.. - If there is a metaphor for the values of Lake Flato, I think it'll be a river.. - You think about a river.. It has a source.. It has a course.. But every once in a while it kinda jumps it's banks.. And we've let that happen within our practice and we think we know where we're going, but whether we generate an idea internally or life kind of hits us from the outside, we've been willing and able to jump our banks.. 10 or so years ago when the country was in a recession that was a real stress point for our office..

We were adding a sustainability department to our office right literally in the middle of the recession.. Because we were looking forward saying, we should not let go of this person we hired six months ago because a recession's hit.. We should figure out how to keep this and actually grow it because it's important.. - My greatest role right now is being a mentor.. Looking at the young staff that come in and just really spending time with them.. - For us doing good is in creating this culture of attracting and then supporting people who just want to do more than just do their job.. There's no hierarchy in how we sit and it makes just standing up and talking and communicating really comfortable.. - We've recognized that we can't practice 80 in a room.. That doesn't make any sense.. It doesn't even work with our physical constraints..

So having these smaller groups of 20 say.... is the right size for mentoring.. Being in touch with each other.. Being in touch with their projects.. - As we change and grow we wanna be better without a lot of definition of what better means.. But we got the work to be better, we'd like the office culture to be better.. I think we apply a little bit of definition to that and leave a lot of it open-ended so that can be a constantly evolving discussion and equation within the office.. But there'll be a group that are probably 10 years younger than Brandi that will need to have different characteristics and attributes about them.. I think we're still trying to figure out exactly who those people are and what those things are that they're gonna bring.. We're planting ideas out in the world and we're planting ideas and thoughts and values with our young architects..

And we're trying to nurture and grow those things to make the world better.. (soft instrumental music)..