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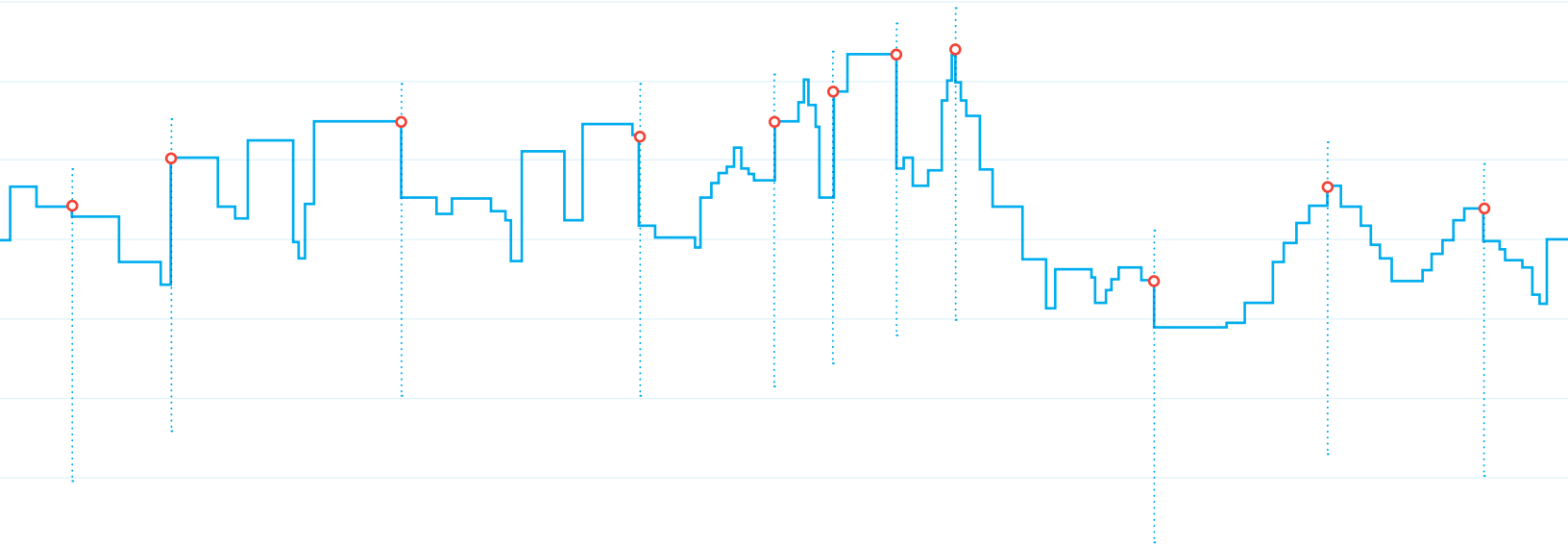
HOW ARCHITECTS THRIVE IN AN UNCERTAIN JOB MARKET



**black
spectacles**

+ TABLE OF CONTENTS

03	EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
04	ANTICIPATE
06	EXPAND YOUR SKILL SET
08	STAY BUSY
09	STRESS MANAGEMENT
10	NETWORKING
11	CONCLUSION
12	CHECKLIST FOR NAVIGATING A DOWNTURN
13	REFERENCES



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the following report, practicing architects provide insight, drawing from personal and professional experience, on how to maintain employment, remain calm in the face of workforce reductions and how to bounce back from a layoff. The architecture industry is known to be cyclical, riding economic roller coasters - high highs come with low lows. These realities are unnerving for individuals clinging to job security, but two architects prove how preparation can help mitigate stress during these downturns.



ANTICIPATE

As mentioned, these cycles are just that - cycles. The **AIA's Architecture Billings Index**¹ is a resource used by many people in the architecture industry to track market trends. The report is an economic indicator for nonresidential construction activity, with a lead time of approximately 9-12 months. This is a trusted resource in predicting shifts and movements in the market. In being able to anticipate downturns, one can prepare for a potential layoff, position themselves within an organization strategically and to brace for a financial stagnation. Having foresight of troubling times ahead gives that much more opportunity for vital planning to weather the storm.

Donna LaTour Thompson is a project architect at a firm in the Detroit area who is currently on furlough. She says there are other indicators to track, “I’m not a business-minded kind of person, and I don’t necessarily get clues from the economy. When you’ve worked in the Detroit area, if the auto companies aren’t doing well, it will trickle down to architecture eventually.” For other regions, **take the dominant industry and use those as key metrics in anticipating movements** in the market.



..... Instead of taking published indices, firms can run their own reports to observe trends.>

Thompson’s firm worked predominantly in the education arena, so the firm ran studies to determine if enrollment in four year institutions was going up or down. Demand for those programs are decreasing, which means the necessity for developing buildings will recede as well. They took this opportunity to diversify their offerings, expanding to have healthcare, a profession that’s been strong continually, as a division in their office. Individuals can do the same, ensuring they have expertise that transcends industries. Find projects that enhance skills that are multidimensional, says Thompson, “A lot of universities I’ve worked in have labs, which is easy to translate to a hospital design.” In anticipating where the business is, architects and designers have the opportunity to find where to broaden their portfolio and resume to stay relevant.



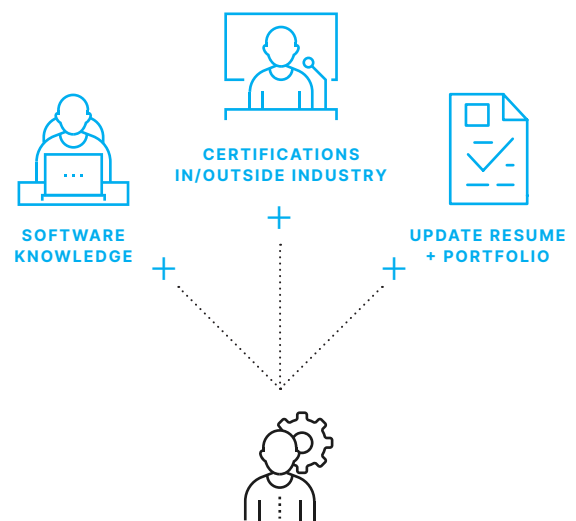
EXPAND YOUR SKILL SET

Architect Heather Rivera, Principal of Alden Architects and Black Spectacles Freelance Architect, survived multiple rounds of layoffs in which two thirds of the workforce was let go from one of the largest Architecture & Engineering firms in the country. She credits her sustained employment to **knowing software**, “One, I was a lower level employee so I had a lower salary. But some of my equals were let go and I stayed, which I attribute to knowing Revit. 2008 is when BIM [building information modeling] became a huge thing, and there was a large push for it.” She maintains that software knowledge is paramount; she attended Autodesk University to get fully immersed in BIM. “Knowing it makes you highly marketable, especially to larger firms,” she says.

Rivera also points out **looking for certification in any discipline** is an indicator of motivation, whether it’s LEED certifications or getting licensed, these efforts show initiative and ambition which are appealing characteristics and provide value as an employee. It doesn’t have to be all related to architectural skills either - Rivera took a Toastmasters course, “It bettered myself holistically, bettered me in public settings and made me more comfortable in social situations. It made me a better active listener and I paid better attention to my vocabulary and word choice.”

Thompson also suggests expanding skills, especially with extra down time. In her furlough, she is keeping her **3D drawing skills** sharp by designing her home bathroom remodel in 3D. She also rarely utilizes Adobe Photoshop in a work setting, so to strengthen that abilities with that she designed her own board game, and created all of the graphics in Photoshop. “It was fun to do, but most importantly improved my skills in Photoshop so I can use them in my jobs coming up,” Thompson says. Outside of software development, she notes now is a great time to **pursue licensure**, “I think it’s pretty important to be registered - it gives you a lot more freedom.”

Add these credentials to a resume, and find references and mentors at the ready to keep avenues open for potential future roles.





“Pick your passion
and see it through.”

HEATHER RIVERA

PRINCIPAL, ALDEN ARCHITECTS



STAY BUSY

If you have been furloughed or let go, Rivera says the down time doesn't have to be down. "Pick your passion and see it through. Staying complacent and spinning your wheels means you're not moving forward at all," she encourages. There are plenty of sustainability certifications, project management courses, healthcare accreditations, Autodesk classes or rendering tutorials to strengthen competencies. Flexing a different muscle, one could **write a white paper** on their personal employment process, submit through the AIA and try to get published.

Thompson has taken to writing throughout her career, composing a trilogy which the game she designed is based off of. "Writing and making

the game, it's therapy and takes my mind off other things," she says. If creating an income is a necessity during a layoff, Thompson recommends **launching freelance endeavors**. "Many firms, especially big firms won't touch residential," she observes. These are good places to start, she says; people always have home improvement projects they want done.



STRESS MANAGEMENT

Managing stress will prevent some of the harmful and long-term side effects it has on the brain. According to Jill Goldstein, a profession of psychiatry and medicine at Harvard Medical School, “Stress affects not only memory and many other brain functions, like mood and anxiety, but also promotes inflammation, which adversely affects heart health. Thus, stress has been associated with multiple chronic diseases of the brain and heart. In addition, it can affect men and women differently,” she says. Some ways to protect yourself from these debilitating effects, are recommended by Harvard Health:



Create a routine and **establish some control over your situation.**



Avoid caffeine after noon and create a peaceful environment so you can **get a good night's sleep.**



Create a concrete list so you can **get organized** and have clear boundaries about your completed tasks.



Earlier intervention may reduce disability caused by stress-related complications later on, so **get help if you need it.**



Strive for healthy responses to stress, not no stress at all. “Earlier intervention may reduce disability caused by stress-related complications later on,” says Dr. Kerry Ressler, professor of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School.²



NETWORKING

Networking is a powerful resource in navigating a shifting career status, anticipating when business will stall and in being alerted to job openings before they are posted. Thompson emphasizes, “It is very important **not to burn any bridges in this profession**. You run into the same people over and over again, even at different places.”

To build solid connections, she points to AIA offshoots and suggests getting involved in their committees, which don’t require an architect title. Designers or engineers can participate in the AIA Committee on the Environment (COTE), where she says, “getting to know a wide spectrum of people is helpful too, because they can be on the lookout for you.” There are plenty of ways to keep the mind sharp while in turn expanding both social and professional networks.

Finding *where* to network is one step, and the other is determining how. The Harvard Business Review, HBR, gives some tips on how to work on networking effectively, especially if it doesn’t come naturally.⁴

1

Focus on Learning

Shift your mindset from what psychologists refer to as “prevention” to “promotion”. Instead of dreading a social event, “Thankfully, as Stanford University’s Carol Dweck has documented in her research, it’s possible to shift your mindset from prevention to promotion, so that you see networking as an opportunity for discovery and learning rather than a chore.”

2

Identify Common Interests

Northwestern University’s Brian Uzzi says, “Potent networks are not forged through casual interactions but through relatively high-stakes activities that connect you with diverse others.”

3

Think Broadly About What You Can Give

In a study conducted by the HBR they found senior members of a law firm were more comfortable in networking settings than junior members, mostly because they aren’t confident in what they can bring to the table. In their book *Influence Without Authority*, Allan Cohen and David Bradford they note people need to expand what they perceive their offerings to be; instead of focusing on tangible things like money or social connections, bring gratitude and recognition.

4

Find a Higher Purpose

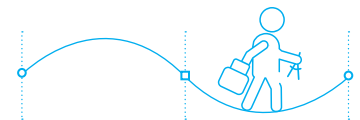
In the study HBR conducted with a law firm, they found attorneys who linked their networking to a collective benefit such as “support my firm” rather than personal ones like “support or help my career” were more likely to network.

Creating a solid network for references, referrals and advice is essential for career growth, and these tips can help in shifting from a fear based approach to a proactive and motivated one.



CONCLUSION

The volatile relationship between economic cycles and architecture is unavoidable, but preparing and surviving downturns isn't. According to the 2017 Survey of Architectural Registration Boards, there are 113,554 architects in the United States of America³, who all navigate these ebbs and flows together. In keeping positive connections and an eye on the trends, one can prepare for a reduction in work, begin to accrue more skills to leverage in a competitive job market, and manage the stress of enduring cutbacks.



113,554

ARCHITECTS IN THE U.S.



CHECKLIST FOR NAVIGATING A DOWNTURN



Track the market

Reference the AIA Billings Index or keep an eye on dominant industries in your city.



Know your software

Get trained in BIM, have an in-depth knowledge of programs heavily used such as Autodesk.



Amp up your resume

Enroll in courses to get certifications, whether its sustainability focused, public speaking or licensure.



Find a side hustle

Write a white paper and get published, start freelance work.



Keep calm and carry on

Manage stress with a good night's sleep, stay organized, seek help if you need it.



Network to get work

Maintain good relationships and expand your connections through engagement in conferences, groups and committees.



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spectacles**

hello@blackspectacles.com