

# Architect Like a Star

A pocket guide to:

- Running your Practice profitably
- Reducing stress
- Thinking and working like a star
- Never letting the recession beat you again

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Dedicated to my wife and children. Without them I am nothing.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION:

*“Do you not get it, lads? The Irish are the blacks of Europe. And Dubliners are the blacks of Ireland. And the Northside Dubliners are the blacks of Dublin. So say it once, say it loud: I’m black and I’m proud.”*

Jimmy Rabbitte - The Commitments.

Jimmy Rabbitte was explaining to the young band that even though they were white and unemployed from the north-side of Dublin they had an equal right to soul music.

Well a lot has happened in Ireland since The Commitments in 1991. We’ve seen the blossoming of the Irish economy into the excesses of The Celtic Tiger from 1995-2005 and the subsequent crash and recession from 2006 until the present day. Hopefully the green shoots of recovery are breaking the ground and the country is finally on the turn, albeit with the Irish public billions in debt following the bank bail outs.

So why have I started this book with a quote from The Commitments?

And what gives me the right to pen a book on business in a country that is on its knees working in an area that has been hardest hit (property and construction) and from an area in that country that has seen the weakest recovery. This is precisely why I have decided to write my thoughts on how you could be running your business. If I can make a business work under these conditions then I feel I have valuable experiences that I can pass on. So let’s paraphrase The

Commitments quote a bit:

*“Do you not get it, lads? The Irish were the hardest hit in Europe. And Mayo men were the hardest hit in Ireland. And the architects and engineers were the hardest hit in Mayo. So say it once, say it loud: I’m going to run my business like a star.”*

Mark Stephens - Architect Like a Star

But what exactly is this book about? How do you run your business like a star? Basically the concept of the book is taking control of your future, taking control of the work that you do, taking control of the people that you work with and most importantly taking control of your clients. I’ve had years of feeling harassed and bullied by clients and the strategies I’m now following (explained in this book) have allowed me finally to take control.

But why a star?

The starting point for this book came from a simple sentence from ‘The Win Without Pitching Manifesto’ by Blair Enns; that is:

*“stars (experts) never audition”*

I would highly recommend reading this manifesto as a primer to this book as Blair sets out the ‘why’ you should stop pitching for work and the ‘how’ to get the work to come to you. The book can even be read online for free or purchased in hard cover or Kindle versions via Amazon at:

<https://www.winwithoutpitching.com/the-manifesto/>

So I have taken “stars never audition” to the next level, what is that stars do to make them successful and how can their habits help you run your business better.

But what gives me the right to write a book on business and running your own design practice? If you look back over this introduction; working in Mayo has been an insightful experience and I have used this to my advantage. Through the constant tweaking of business methods and practices I have resulted in a way of doing business that works.

What has occurred is similar to experiments are conducted in space; where you are able to test hypotheses in a unique environment. I have been presented with such an environment, an environment where as described above that is the worst profession in the worst area in the worst country in Europe! So I urge you if you are reading this in the next recession, in an economically inhospitable area to use my experience to your advantage as I have done and if the results I have stumbled upon worked for me now, they will also work for you now and for you also in the future. Bear in mind that your area may not have the same economic constraints or types of clients as we have worked with; but if they can work for us, here then they can also work for you.

But why would I give this information away? To paraphrase the words of Marx; will I be selling the rope from which I will be hung by? The benefits of me sharing this information are numerous:

We now live in a sharing environment, everyone benefits when we share information.

By sharing this knowledge I am 'leveling the playing field'; business would be a lot easier if all architects, designers and clients worked using the methods described here.

I have been in business nearly thirty years, I'll have to stop at some stage and the information I have gained in that time should be passed on.

Clients will have a much better understanding about what is required from them.

I am adopting one of the tenets of the book - monetisation. This book has now become an additional revenue stream for our practice.

So let's get started. Each chapter covers a specific 'star' habit and how that habit can make you take control of your business.

## 2. Who exactly is this book for?

The book has been designed with architects in mind (hence the title) and an architect has written it with substantial experience in the business of architect as well running businesses in several different sectors.

However, the methods and techniques described in this book would equally apply to all other 'design' related service industries including engineers, interior designers, landscape architects; the techniques could also apply even to web, graphic and software designers.

It is strange to think that I am now approaching the last quarter of my working life; at the time of writing I am 53 years old and hopefully I'll be able to retire at some stage in my sixties (well at least have a little more choice over the projects and clients I would like to take on). The book therefore is initially aimed at other architects of similar age; those that are tired of chasing after projects, clients and cash flow. Architects that would like to know of another way of working - a way of working akin to being 'a star'.

The book is equally suitable for architects and other designers who are of a younger age than myself - why make the same mistakes that I did? Whether you are currently running your own business or just thinking about it - this book explains the methods of ensuring that you get paid, in full, in advance prior to any work commencing.

As well as 'The Win Without Pitching Manifesto' by Blair Enns; I would highly recommend Architect+Entrepreneur by

Eric Reinholdt as it contains excellent information on how architects need to think out of the box in order to maximise profits in their business via passive income. A particular paragraph really stands out:

*“I’ve seen many of these tire kicking, unsure, testing-the-waters, pondering, dreaming of what could be prospects. Many clients treat the process of hiring an architect as if it were a hobby. They ask of us things they wouldn’t dare ask other professionals. “We’re asking each architect to sketch up a few designs and we’ll award the project to the one whose sketches we like best...” Seriously? Try asking your dentist for a “test cleaning” promising to award the dental contract to the one who does the best job.”*

What Eric proposes are methods for architects to achieve ‘Passive income’; that is “an **income** received on a regular basis, with little effort required to maintain it”.

Architect+Entrepreneur is excellent and highly recommended.

There are a few cross-overs between this book and that by Eric Reinholdt which we’ll discuss later; the premise however in ‘Architect Like a Star’ is that ‘What if you want to continue as an architect but need a better way of dealing and handling clients?’. That’s where this book comes into play. It’s written in order for you to primarily keep your architectural practice alive and your sanity intact. By all means introduce methods of Passive Income and the techniques Eric works through of ‘*triaging*’ buying customers into perfect clients are nothing short of outstanding. But you may have only the time and effort to undertake only architectural work; adopting the principles described in ‘Architect Like a Star’ will remove the “*tire kickers, unsures, water testers, ponderers and dreamers*” from your life as well as removing the running around after jobs,

clients and income throughout the client process.

What's required to move forward in both Eric's book and the one you are now reading is a change in mindset. It has taken me many years to flick that switch in my head to fully implement and understand the principles in this book. It took me many years to change that mindset. Thank God it has now been done and I can move forward in order to enjoy my work and my life. What's interesting is that Eric's book also requires you to change your mindset; the switch that he is asking you to make is:

You don't have to trade your hours for dollars - Passive Income is a viable way forward to increase your profits with little effort (once set up)

You don't have to have everything finished in order to sell. Pre-orders on micro-products can establish the principle. Then build and expand.

The mindset change I am asking you to make is that:

You get paid upfront for a large percentage of the project BEFORE doing any work

You should never 'have to' work for free

So let's get started. First we need to change our mindset...

### 3. How to change your mindset

Before we can change our mindset we first need to understand what it is?

Your mindset is the sum of your knowledge, thoughts and most importantly your beliefs about the world and how you fit into the world.

Your mindset sets how you react to specific information and circumstances and how this 'input' is filtered via your mindset

It is essential that when you want to adapt to new ideas or beliefs that your mindset changes. It is your 'belief-system' that therefore needs to change in order to take on board any new beliefs.

In order to change your mindset in a positive manner you will need to:

1. Find and understand the beliefs that support a better way of interacting with the world
2. Verify that these new beliefs are in harmony with an improved future reality

What Eric Reinholdt in Architecture+Entrepreneur requires of your mindset is to change it's way of thinking so that:

You don't have to trade your hours for dollars; and,  
You can sell products before they're ready.

If you look at these two simple 'mindset changers':

Both of these principles support a better way for you to interact with the world and both of these principles are in harmony with an improved 'future' reality for you. In essence changing your mindset in this instance is a no-brainer. Admittedly, the *Passive Income Principles* that Eric proposes require investment in time more so than money but the results are obvious and the double-winner is that you are still continuing to run your architectural practice, albeit using a better methodology.

What I am therefore asking in this book is for you to change your mindset such that you flip on it's head the idea that:

You do the work and then get (or not) after you've done it.  
To getting paid a lot more for the work. BEFORE YOU DO IT!

Again it's a no-brainer and again let's look at how we change our mindset:

Working Like a Star supports a better way for you to interact with the world;  
And I can verify that working with this new mindset will improve your future reality.

It's beyond the scope of this book to delve deeper regarding the psychology of mind-sets but if you're interested in this subject I suggest you visit <http://www.myrkothum.com/mindset/> for more information. All I can ask is that you trust in what I am writing and take a leap of faith in changing your mindset in much the same way that Eric Reinholdt is asking you to change your mindset in utilising his passive income methods.

The change of mindset is what will move you from stressing about if and when you will get paid, getting paid in full and in advance and therefore giving full concentration to your work. Look at the mindset change that McDonalds instigated in the fast food industry (they probably weren't the first but they have fine-tuned the entire order and delivery process). I remember going to a McDonalds in the 1970's on a school trip and it was the first time for the teacher to experience fast food; we now see his first experience as being the norm. It took McDonalds to change our mindset to the way food was ordered and delivered. I'm not saying that your architecture needs to be 'junk-food'; just that in order to change the way you work, you need to change your mindset. Let's look at what the teacher experienced for the first time:

The food is ordered and paid for BEFORE you receive it. This is the situation if you decide to takeaway or eat in the restaurant. This was a fundamental change from the traditional 'restaurant' business model where you order the food, eat it and then on completion pay for it. The restaurant is trusting that you will enjoy the food and then pay for it. There obviously will be a small percentage of diners who will eat the food and then do everything they can to get out of paying for it. This 'restaurant' business model is the traditional way that architects work; you are appointed, you do the work and then you get paid for it. The problem is the difference between the two business models; the fare provided by the restaurant is **specific** and **closed**. This means there is a straightforward description of your chosen meal; for example:

*Grilled Fillet Of Salmon, Grilled Mediterranean Vegetable Salad,  
Basil And Lime Dressing*

The restaurant is then delivering to your table something very specific yet also still open to some interpretation. In this example, as long as everything is reasonably cooked; the fish isn't burnt or raw and all of the items are included on the plate then you're happy. The problem in architecture is that what you are asked to do appears specific but the sheer amount of variables means that the architect is asked to create something essentially **intangible**. Effectively a 'one-off' design is a 'one-off' meal with ingredients that can vary based on the situation, the clients budget and the demands from third parties such as planning departments. This makes design and architecture a very **open** environment that contains many variables and moving targets. If you do adopt the 'restaurant' business model it's essential to minimise these variables and architects have traditionally done this by carefully written briefs, full documentation and record-keeping throughout every stage of the project. Even then you are still at risk to non and slow payers; admittedly they are also thankfully a small percentage of the overall client base. The premise therefore of this book is the following:

To change your mindset to a better way of working where  
your payment is increased and paid much, much earlier  
To minimise your risk to clients who are slow to pay and to  
those who don't want to pay at all.

## 4. My favourite subject. Me!

I'm often accused of bringing a conversation around to my favourite subject, me! But it's important for me to give a little backstory in order to explain how this book has arisen. I qualified as an architect in the UK in 1990 and then promptly quit architecture and went into several businesses in various sectors.

Here is what I did:

- Software sales (CAD and even sports software)
- Software training; one-to-one, groups and online
- Photographic Virtual Reality Tours (6 years before Google Streetview!)
- Photorealistic CAD rendering
- Multi-media & CD-ROM production
- Web-site design
- Book writing

As you can see there wasn't much I wasn't doing! What's interesting is that this experience and skill learning was directly transferred into my re-emergence as an architect. The skills I learnt in marketing, IT skills to running the business have directly helped in me setting up an architectural practice from the West of Ireland.

What's also interesting is that some of these additional forms of revenue are mentioned by Eric Reinholdt in 'Architect + Entrepreneur'. I would heartily recommend any of these business models to architects and as Eric says what's important is that you can undertake any of them as long as they will *"hold your interest over time, keep you excited and*

*consistently return [to them] to add value*". What's incredible is that architects are a resourceful bunch, they are taught to analyse problems and come up with solutions and the ways that architects have diversified is also incredible; below are a range of disciplines that my colleagues have diversified into:

- Poetry
- Music production
- Product Design
- Web site design
- Furniture design

Fast forward 10 years and I'd met my wife and had 3 kids and literally packed the car with a few bags and headed to Ireland; the plan was to continue running the UK companies remotely from Ireland (London was an hour flight from Knock International Airport (as it was known then; now know as Ireland West Airport – the best small airport in the world)).

I had no intention of becoming an architect again and it was only when we designed and built our own house that others on the tail of the Celtic Tiger wanted the same. I had no idea how to run an architectural practice in Ireland and this book is the result of the failures I have made along the way.

As Robert F. Kennedy said:

*"Only those who dare to fail greatly can ever achieve greatly."*

So now I have written a few tips on how I run a business, they may also work for you – there are no guarantees, only the confirmation that I am now running a business from the West of Ireland and have greater control over my projects and my clients.

Again I can only wholeheartedly recommend Architect + Entrepreneur by Eric Reinholdt as the methods and business models he espouses also mirror the skills and advice given in this publication. Even as someone who has undertaken a wide variety of different jobs through the years; I have now returned to architecture and have also returned to supplementing my skillset and revenue as an architect with other forms of passive income – the key tenets of which are proposed by Eric. This book has effectively also become another revenue earner for Mark Stephens Architects; this is in addition to the other books I have written on:

- Vectorworks 101+ Tips & Tricks
- The Irish Rural House – Design Guidelines
- L'Etape du Tour – Training & Survival
- Paris Roubaix – The Sportive Challenge

Even now that I have fully jumped over to an architectural design practice; I still dabble in other areas; we recently completed an app (uCalc) for Apple iOS and Android (with eldest son as lead programmer) which is a u-value calculator using the Passivhaus methodology. The app is free to download and acts as a marketing tool for my architectural practice and my Certified European Passivhaus Consultancy.

## 5. Stars are always busy

We are now ready to make the jump with a brand new mindset. Let's start by imagining you are the busiest actor or musician on the planet. Would you be running around looking for new work? Would you jump into the car for a meeting with the off chance of a possible new job? No. If you're a star the work comes to you. You don't beg for work. You don't prostitute yourself trying to get every project that passes your way. If you're a successful 'star' you can pick and choose your work, work with the people (clients) that you want to work with and do the type of work that you want to be doing.

Isn't this just fanciful thinking? So how do I get the work?

Firstly you have to be good at what you do, bloody good.

You then have to show the world the type of work that you can do and how good you are at doing it.

Once your potential clients know the type and quality of your work, the battle is then half won; you then have to make it easy for the client to contact you. At this point you don't race into the car to meet them; remember how busy you are (even if you're not); remember that you have many clients and projects that you're currently working with (even if you're not). You want the client to want to work with you more than anybody else and that comes from having confidence in you and your work and thinking that you can do the same great job on their project.

This requires balls of steel. It is so tempting to jump in that car

but the moment that you do you have lost the respect of your client. Remember how busy you are. You haven't got the time to race about looking for work; you have stacks of high quality work and brilliant clients that you are already creating great work with and it will be a privilege for this potential client to be working with you. You want this client to believe he's working with an awesome company and this belief comes about by working with someone that is very busy and not with someone that is sitting around doing nothing all day. The client's mind sees how busy you are and equates this with success, ergo if you are really busy then by de-facto you are a success and the potential client almost by default wants to work with you more than anybody else. To summarise:

You are busy;

You are therefore a success;

The client wants his or her own project to also be a success.

The client wants you to be their architect to make their project a success.

This business is easier said than done when you either have no work or you're in the middle of a recession with what appears to be no work around. This is where you are wrong; even in the darkest, deepest recession there is always work to be found and there are always people around with money to spend. It's just that you have to go the right way about finding them. The trick therefore is to make yourself busy; showcase the work that you have done in order to get the person with the money to come to you. Remember that even in a recession, you are still so busy that it's impossible for you to leave your office and to leave the work you are currently undertaking in order to meet someone on the off chance of the possibility of a job.

Think about it sensibly; if a potential client has no money then firstly why would you jump in a car to meet them when there's zero possibility of a job anyway and secondly. And secondly, if there is someone out there that does have the money to appoint you; when they see how good you are they'll want to be working with you anyway. A potential client doesn't want to be working with someone that has no work. To the potential client: no work = business failure.

So remember, you're incredibly busy. Too busy to meet a potential client straightaway. You're too busy to leave the office to leave all the other incredible projects and clients that you're working with. So rather than race into that car to meet a potential client, schedule a meeting at your office for sometime in the future; your diary remember is always very full and it takes a week or two to find a time to meet up. Explain how busy you are; explain that you have several projects that need to be worked on before you meet. By working this way you are reinforcing how good you are. Remember: busy = successful.

Also remember that you need to treat this 'busyness' exactly the same in a recession as when you're not. If you're reading this now in recession, pitch your mind forward when you are out of it; imagine how busy you will be. You won't be rushing into the car chasing the job when you are already picking and choosing the projects that you're working on. The trick is to think 'busy' before you are busy and then for you always to be busy before, during and after any recession. In a similar way to Rudyard Kipling's poem 'If':

*If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster  
And treat those two impostors just the same;*

Treat the two impostors 'Recession' or 'no Recession' exactly the same, you're always too busy to race out for a possible job. No matter what.

The problem with this racing out is that it takes up valuable time when you could be doing something else - like producing actual work. Every time I leave the office it's taking time, work and money away from my paying clients. Even if you have no work on, it's taking valuable time from doing something that you actually want to do; like playing with your kids or riding a bike! Don't believe that you'll always get that job when you race out the door; sometimes you will but often times you most likely won't.

Living on the West coast of Ireland means that meeting someone at their site involves considerable distance driving and with this comes the time lost that I could have been working on paying clients or out enjoying myself with my kids or riding my bike.

The single biggest change of strategy was getting my own office. The days of having to tidy up the house before a potential client comes for a meeting are over. Now generally all meetings are conducted at my office in Swinford (County Mayo). The advantage of not having to either tidy up the home or to race out to meet the client at their site is immense and as well as creating a better businesslike impression, the office allows me to save time and money. I convinced myself that my business model where I worked from home factored in the additional travelling I undertook to visit potential clients. What wasn't factored in was the time lost when I could have been doing something else, the money spent on diesel

travelling around the countryside on no-hope projects and the additional tiredness and stress by constantly being on the road. Trust me, your first step in business freedom and control is getting your own office that is separate from your house. A separate office also means that I can shut the door in the evening, head home and work is forgotten until the next day.

What's interesting is that potential clients immediately assume and request that you visit them at their site or house, and most people trying to be helpful feel that they should jump in their cars and race out to see them. Hold on, hold on. What have I just told you? You don't need to race into the car. You don't need to visit them. Let them come to you at your office. A few photographs and a Google map are all that's required for me to price a job. And with Google StreetView you're even able to take a virtual tour of the property from the outside without leaving your desktop.

It's also at this point that you need to separate explaining your strategy for doing the work from the actual work. It's very easy to get sucked into producing ideas and options trying to solve the client's problem. **THIS IS ACTUALLY THE WORK!** What you can do in this initial meeting (at your office remember) is to give an outline of the STRATEGY you'll adopt in order to solve the client's problem together with how much your services will cost to deliver the solutions in line with the strategy. It's just an outline of the steps involved in the strategy, not the solutions themselves. The ideas or solutions that solve the strategy are the part you should be getting paid for. As Blair Enns says:

"We will diagnose before we prescribe" and

“A client asking for unpaid ideas in a written proposal is like a patient asking for a diagnosis and prescription from a doctor he refuses to visit or pay.”

What you also should be wary of is the client professing how beautiful and unique their site or property is and that you won't appreciate or understand what is required without actually visiting. This is also a fallacy; every site is obviously unique but at this initial stage you don't need to travel out to see it; the uniqueness of the site and all its lovely characteristics will influence the solutions you put forward in line with your strategy but this happens AFTER you have been appointed.

To understand this difference between diagnosis and prescription, if you haven't already done so read:

<https://www.winwithoutpitching.com/the-manifesto/>

## 6. A star doesn't work for free

What is it about architects that people think they can work for free?

Is it that we love our work so much that we'll give away our skills for nothing?

Is our work so easy that other people don't value it?

Check out this funny video from AdWeek showing other professions being asked to give away their products for nothing:

<http://www.adweek.com/adfreak/watch-people-other-industries-react-hilariously-being-asked-free-spec-work-167945>

The video was pitched at advertising agencies but the exact same problems occur for architects and designers.

I wouldn't dare ask a car mechanic to fix my car free of charge; so why do people still ask me for free designs?

So back to the star analogy; Stars are paid a lot of money and they choose their 'pro-bono' projects very carefully. Let's take Leonardo DiCaprio as an example:

From 1995-2015 he allegedly earn over \$240,000,000. Even in 1993 he still earn \$75,000 for What's Eating Gilbert Grape (data from: <http://www.statisticbrain.com/leonardo-dicaprio-movie-career-statistics/>)

DiCaprio gets paid well for what he does. You should do the same.

He's also a tough cookie and is serious about his work; he allegedly (along with Tobey Maguire) successfully sued the filmmakers of 'Don's Plum' and thereby blocked the film from being shown.

Get tough, and serious about your work - don't give away your skills for free.

DiCaprio also does great charity work and has set up a foundation - <http://leonardodicaprio.org> - to protect the planet. The foundation was founded in 1998 and according to its website, it focuses on "*protecting biodiversity, ocean and forest conservation and climate change*"

So if you want to do charity work - do it. Just don't give away your work for free when people are well able to pay for it.

Also remember that you have clients that pay for your work; why should another person get something for free when others have to pay?

Just as I finished writing a large chunk of a chapter for this book, I flicked over to Twitter and caught the image below in my timeline from Architect Neal Pann (let me know if you are the original creator of this meme as I would be more than happy to give you the biggest credit ever for promoting such commonsense). An image, which sums the situation perfectly. There is a rising tide of architects (and other designers) that have had enough of being asked to work for free.

And in the words of Howard Beale in the film Network:

"I'M AS MAD AS HELL, AND I'M NOT GOING TO TAKE THIS ANYMORE!"



You often hear the same things when you're being asked to work for free; in actual fact I don't believe the people asking actually realise that they're asking you to work for free! Let's look at the subtle ways you get asked:

1. What's said: *"We're just looking for an idea to get us started"*

What it actually means: *"We want you to work for nothing to get something for free"*

2. What's said: *"We've had several people around (for free no doubt) and they can't come up with what we're looking for, we think you as a great designer could do it!"*

What it actually means: *"We've tried it on with several designers already, who didn't value their time and we don't want to invest any money in the process so we therefore also want you to work for nothing and to get something for freer"*

3. What's said: *"We're looking for something really straightforward, it won't take you very long and we know exactly what we want."*

What it actually means: *"It will end up being the hardest, most problematic job of all (for which you're getting no money remember. It will takes forever and the client has no idea what they like or don't like."*

Every one of these should be ringing alarm bells in your head and it's very easy for you to get sucked in, take your eye off the ball (see the section 'Keeping your eye on the ball!') and end up working for free.

The way to combat clients of this type is to fully explain the process; the process as Australian architect Glen Murcutt says is not easy, it takes time and effort and thereby money. Frequently the jobs that look the easiest are the hardest of all. The concept of 'just an idea' does not work in the building game, there are too many factors involved that 'just an idea'

completely unfeasible - from client demands to planning constraints and onto budget and delivery. I am currently working on a project that has taken a year of solid effort in pre-planning BEFORE we could lodge the planning application - the idea that the client could just come to me and get 'just an idea for free' is laughable when you consider the amount of work that has to take place.

So what I am talking about here is client education; the client needs to understand your process regarding how you work (including fees) and what the process works in the delivery of your work. I have an entire section on my web site that outlines my process, the sequence and process of typical projects and what my process is at:

**<http://markstephensarchitects.com/the-process/>**

But how do you move from working for free to the explanation of your process, when you haven't even got the job yet?

The answer is in the monetisation of that initial consultation. It's very common to be asked for a 'chat' about someones project. It is never, ever just a 'chat'. These initial meetings ALWAYS contain you working. Giving design and planning advice or working out costs. When you have a 'chat' in this way, you're working and if you're working then you should be getting paid. So currently, my initial consultations are now a paid service. The fee is paid in advance, online and I explain that there is no design involved in this initial consultation; just the opportunity for us to discuss the project and see if we can be a good fit regarding design and budget. It gives me the opportunity to explain my design process, how I work and

then to give a fuller and more detailed proposal for taking the project further in either a partial or full architectural service.

Several of my colleagues have similar methods of working; UK architect Jane Leach of [i-architect.co.uk](http://i-architect.co.uk) also provides similar consultations in the same manner. Jane divides the initial (Home Design Consultations) meetings into 2 types:

### 1. The Home Concept Meeting

Which is a one-hour meeting in the clients home, where Jane evaluates the property and aspirations and provides the client with advice, fresh ideas and inspiration. An outline architectural brief with you and an online ideas book is then prepared for the client to use. [Editors note: This sounds practically identical to my 'Initial consultation'. Remember this first meeting always involves work. The client may not realise it but you do. This is why you need to ensure it's a chargeable service,

### 2. The Home Design Workshop

This is a half day meeting with Jane in the client's home, the brief is developed, and overall measurements. Jane then sketches plans of the existing site or building before sitting down with the client to sketch designs that meet their requirements. This provides the clients with sketch layouts, new and inspirational ideas, and knowledge about what is possible and how to take the project forward. We have recently introduced similar consultancy services in our own Practice that can be paid for online at:

**<http://www.markstephensarchitects.com/shop/>**

Architect Paul McNally of The Passive House Architecture Company takes this initial consultation further still and explains his process succinctly below:

*“For the last two years I have taught an accredited CPD course at the RIAI called ‘Improving Cost Knowledge’. My focus has been on how, and why, we should direct each potential client to begin our interaction with a Needs and Options Review. I have bespoke packages for residential and commercial clients. The purpose of this review is*

- to establish a ball-park, all-inclusive cost budget for their wish list*
- provide a reduced scope of works to marry wish list priorities with their budget*
- provide a fee proposal for each option*
- give general advice in the report in relation to logistics, statutory approvals, PSDP, specialist surveys, other consultants, contributions, expenses, vat, grants etc.*

*From the practitioner’s perspective, this makes the practice of architecture much more effective, more rewarding professionally and commercially. By insisting on this process, and charging for it you remove from your workload a host of demands on time, from ‘clients’ who are not in fact and never could be your clients. This is because they do not have the means to engage you or any architect. [editors note: ‘tyre-kickers’]*

*It means that the clients, who you do move forward with, have established that the project is broadly viable at the earliest stage. These clients can take comfort in knowing that their fees are not also covering your costs incurred with countless consultations with other dead-end leads. We all know, the great thing about the last decade of TV architects showing the public what we do, is that now everyone*

*wants to hear what an architect can do to their home. Unfortunately it also means that now everyone wants to hear what an architect can do to his or her home!*

*From the moment we start talking to a potential lead as an architect, we start solving their problems. As soon as you share your experience, discuss a possibility, point out a statutory requirement, you are providing them with your most precious skill, your vast knowledge of all the things that enable or prevent a construction project from happening. Would you phone a doctor, describe your symptoms and expect a discussion on the range of possible causes and remedies for free?*

*Many architects, who argue that all they do in a free consultation is talk about their experience and past projects, are lying to themselves. Get a website, put your projects up there. If a 'client' has not looked at your website and assured themselves as to your competence, then they are not serious about hiring anyone. I guarantee you, if you had a charge on the consultation, they would have taken care of this before they contacted you.*

*If you do not put a value on your time, from the absolute outset, you are betraying to clients your own fear of asking for reasonable payment, and this will permeate your relationship with them for the rest of the process, even to the point of being afraid to issue an invoice when the work is done. We have all been there!*

*Instead, produce a Needs and Options Review for a fixed fee. This tells clients what they most need to know, to face up to the scale of the commitment they are embarking on. I have had countless clients tell me how delighted they are to find an architect who will take them through this first step, and cannot believe that all architects don't do it. In Germany it is a core skill.*

*From your point of view, your fee will be presented in its rightful*

*place, a small fraction of the overall cost. Your fee is much more palatable, when it is dwarfed by the twenty or so other expenses to be considered. This means you have a greater chance of negotiating a reasonable fee for your services. And if you are paid properly, you have no excuse but to give the best service possible. The alternative is that you begin the fee negotiation in a vacuum, where the client, full of fear of the overall unknown, has no choice but to try to minimise every expense put before them, and if your fee negotiation is the first and only cost they have to consider, why would they not balk at whatever you present, no matter how unsustainable it might actually be?"*

Notice in both of these examples that neither of them are meeting the client without getting paid first. Neither of the examples are wasting time, effort and their skills and experience with tyre kickers. And both of the architects are monetising this critical first step in project formation and 'triaging' their clients before the next larger steps are taken.

The current TV 'Starchitect' in Ireland is Dermot Bannon from 'Room to Improve' and I love yelling at the TV with the antics of client, builder and QS. The biggest yell occurred during one episode when Dermot was playing Gaelic hurling with a client and a random player pulled Dermot to one side and asked his advice on an extension for his own house. The problem with architects is that they desperately want to be helpful (see the section on 'A star isn't helpful'); so what is wrong with this helpfulness?

1. Remember the rule: *"We will diagnose before we prescribe"*. Did Dermot see the house? Did he survey the house before giving advice? Did he fully analyse what the client required rather than just a chat next to a Gaelic pitch?

2. Remember the rule: *"A star doesn't work for free"*. Did the Gaelic player offer to pay Dermot for his advice? No. Did any money exchange hands? No. Why should this person get something for free when other have to pay for it?
3. Remember the rule: *"It's never just a chat, it's always work"*. There wasn't even any pretence that this was an informal chat about architecture. It was a successful and downright blatant attempt at getting architectural advice for free!

What was particularly annoying was that as well as Dermot doing such an act, it was then filmed, broadcast and encouraged by RTÉ (the state TV broadcaster) in that this is how architects work; go ahead and get them to work for you, for free. As Paul McNally said earlier we are now seeing everyone wanting to see what an architect can do in their home and apparently they will do it for free! What is missing in ALL of these TV property shows is the nitty-gritty of the terms of appointment, fees and payment terms on how the architect (and other design professionals) are appointed. All we see are architects turning up at houses, having difficulties and then a beautiful project on completion; this is then compounded by also seeing that architect will also do design work at the side of a Gaelic pitch without any charge.

## 7. Stars get paid. A lot. And a big chunk upfront

In order to get paid like a star you first need to start thinking like a star.

You need to fully understand that you have something that your clients will want and for that your client needs to understand that you will be charging accordingly. Now I'm not saying that an architect is to be paid the same as a film star (I'm sure the big names may be getting close however); it's the principle that's important.

The same principle is that you need to be getting paid a good whack of money otherwise you're thinking like a D-list actor and not a star. Do you want higher amounts of income or lower - it's a no-brainer. If you consider Angelina Jolie who gets allegedly \$15 million per movie, she understands her worth to the film industry and she understands the money that is required from the studios in order for her to be in their film. You therefore require a shift in your mindset; away from thinking that the client is doing you a favour in taking you on, into understanding that you have something the client requires in order for the end result to be achieved.

What's also important to understand is that this \$15 million isn't coming in dribs and drabs years after the film is made. It's UPFRONT! Angelina Jolie does not expect to be working week after week, not getting paid with the view of getting her payment months after the film is wrapped up. Angelina Jolie is paid her fee for the film upfront and this is the way you should be paid too.

I've gone through every permutation under the sun and I'm going to go into more detail on these in the next two sections but an outline of the 'big chunk upfront' is explained here:

Let's take a typical residential project that is typically divided into four stages:

1. Sketch design
2. Developed design to planning application
3. Detail design and construction/tender information
4. On site construction, inspection & certification.

There are then three 'standard' ways of getting paid at the beginning on a project of this type:

1. No upfront payment. The result being that some clients will never pay when the work is completed
2. A small amount upfront for the entire project. The result here is that some clients will back out part way through the project and will leave you exposed to large amounts of work completed but not paid for
3. 50% of the stage upfront. The result here is that some clients will again back out leaving you exposed to large amounts of work completed but not paid for

There is only one viable option for you not to be exposed when a client bails out without paying:

- An upfront payment for the entire amount of each work stage

This way you are never at financial risk and you have you

never completed work that you will not get paid for.

The urge however is to rush into a project without getting this upfront money. This occurs when you are excited about getting started with the excitement of getting some money in. Stop, Think like a star. Don't do any work or get involved in any way until that upfront payment arrives. In full.

What's a great phrase, and a favourite of Bob Borson at ([www.lifeofanarchitect.com](http://www.lifeofanarchitect.com)) is that everyone should have 'some skin in the game'. Let's look at the definition of 'Skin in the game':

*"to be at risk financially because you have invested in something that you want to happen*

*You take more ownership of something when you have some skin in the game."* (Macmillan Dictionary)

It's that second part of *"You take more ownership of something when you have some skin in the game."* Without that large financial investment to you, upfront for their project; without that *"skin in the game"* - your client will not value the time and money spent by you working on their project. In fact you're doing a favour to the client by taking this large upfront payment off them. By them paying you a large upfront payment and having *"some skin in the game"* they are taking ownership of their project. Working in this way has several repercussions:

1. You're not left at risk of clients not paying
2. You're not having to continually chase clients for payments

3. You are in control
4. The client is taking more ownership of the project and is less likely to bail out without paying you.
5. You're beginning to think like a star in order to get paid like a star

If we go back to the beginning of this chapter; where a star get paid a lot. I'm going to emphasise again that you have a valuable skill and knowledge that the client requires. Let's imagine that a recession has started, you're desperate for work and a potential client comes to you with a project but he/she says that they have little money to finance what they want to do. The temptation is to lower your fees to keep yourself in work, the temptation is to tell yourself that you're in a recession and that no one has any money and that in order to keep working than you need to lower your fees. Resist these temptations. The reality is that it will be true that the majority of people will have less money and will not want to spend it on your skills. But that being said there is always in a recession a small percentage of people still with money, even making more money than they did previously. These are the people that you need to be targeting in order to keep yourself alive. How do you do this? By firstly being very good at what you do, to have a specialist skill-set and to start thinking like a star. Let's look at the sums a little for this:

10 small jobs at £1,000 = £10,000

Hanging on to get the right person for 1 job = £10,000

What this requires however is 'balls of steel'; to market your services with no work coming in, to up-skill yourself to arm yourself with the skill set that the client is looking for. And

then to wait until that 'right' client comes with the 'right' project and then to get that large upfront payment. Now you'll be thinking and acting like a star.

The problem also arises that if you take the 10 small jobs on and finally you actually get 'the big one', you'll spend most of your time running around on the small jobs without giving the time and attention that is required to do the big one properly. Also if word goes around that you are providing full architectural services for £1,000 it's very difficult to get that price up to where it should be. The problem with a '*race to the bottom*' on fees is that firstly there will always be someone trying to under cut you and secondly that once the fees start dropping they're impossible to get them back up again. Think what would a star do? Would the star drop his/her fee at the drop of a hat? No. The star stays firm, understands their worth and charges what they always charged, whether in recession or not.

The next stage in this 'Getting paid upfront' is that after getting the large chunk you then have to keep the money rolling in as the stars do. The trick is to not start any further work until you get that next upfront payment. The stars have a much better system in that in addition to getting their upfront fee; they also obtain revenue from the 'backend' that is money as a percentage of the film profit or ticket sales. This could be a possibility if you were to tie in with a property developer for example; the risk is however that the developer will want you to do all the work without the upfront payment; this is the developer trying to get you to put your skin in the game at the beginning without him (at this stage) risking anything. What would the star do? For me this is too big a risk, I have many mouths to feed and I need that upfront

payment to get the project started. I'm sure however that there maybe some who would prefer this way of working as the rewards could be greater. Remember however that generally the star gets that upfront fee AND the money from the 'backend'. The best 'star' analogy for working without payment must come from Tom Hanks who waived his fee for 'Saving Private Ryan' in exchange for 20% of the gross receipts which earned him \$40 million. It should be remembered however that this astuteness has come about from Mr Hanks being able to pick his projects extraordinarily well, something that you may (or may not) be able to do yourself with developers.

What we're talking about here is commitment. You as the designer are committing to the client that you will produce your best work for them and to achieve the best result that you can, this is in exchange for the commitment that the client is also required to give and this commitment starts financially, with a large upfront payment BEFORE any work is even contemplated. Without this monetary commitment the client doesn't feel fully committed to the project and remember that you are doing them a favour by asking for this money in order to give them the empowerment to feel that the project is truly theirs!

I mentioned in the introduction about the similarity between our work and undertaking experiments in the rarified atmosphere of outer space. It may be that you will work for years without clients pulling out of projects and 'forgetting' to pay the architect. But in the rarified atmosphere of the West of Ireland it's very common and the advice contained in this book is unfortunately the outcome of the rotten apples that have spoilt the barrel. The reasons for pulling out have

invariably nothing to do with the architect or his design; let's look at a few reasons either our practice or colleagues have experienced:

Death  
Divorce  
Banks pulling plug  
Change of mind  
Husband not agreeing with wife  
Wife not agreeing with husband  
Clients unable to make up minds

You can see that the reasons are numerous; why risk a load of time, effort and money producing work and then not getting paid for it; especially when the reason you're not getting paid has nothing to do with you. So I emphasise again, get paid what you're worth and get it upfront.

## 8. Why the retainer/deposit model doesn't work

I've now explained that you need to get a large chunk of your money for a project 'upfront'. We now need to backtrack a little to explain why the other 'upfront' business models don't work.

As a background to myself; I requalified as an architect in Ireland in 2005; in order to become a member with the Royal Institute of Architects of Ireland (RIAI) was to attend the Part III (Architectural Practice and Management Lectures at University College Dublin). Bear in mind that I'd already qualified and worked as an architect in the UK since 1990. One of the interesting lectures was on the appointment agreement and fees with the recommendation that you obtain a 'retainer' to be paid 'in advance of the architect commencing work'. This optional amount is still included in the RIAI Agreements (text below from the 'Domestic' agreement between Client & Architect):

*The percentage or lump sum charge includes a retainer of € \_\_\_\_\_ + VAT payable in advance of the Architect commencing work.*

The argument being that why should you the architect start a project, being out of money whilst the client gets to start the project without (as I've said before) 'Any skin in the game'.

The sentiment is correct but there's a long way to go before the end of the project, this retainer deposit would invariably only be a percentage of the first stage and would more than

likely only be a smaller lump sum amount 'to get the project started'.

The problem as I've just said is that there's a long way to go from this retainer/deposit until the completion of the first work stage; let alone the work involved on further work stages until the completion of the building. If we look at a typical domestic project which the RIAI divides into four Work Stages:

Work Stage 1: Initial (or sketch) design

Work Stage 2: Developed design (normally to planning application)

Work Stage 3: Detail design (construction/tender information & going out to tender)

Work Stage 4: Construction (administration of contracts & inspection/certification of works for example)

You can see that once the retainer is used up; there is a large percentage of Work Stage 1 and all of Work Stages 2, 3 & 4 where the project can flounder; where you are the only one left with 'skin in the game'.

Remember at any stage the following could happen to ensure that the project doesn't proceed and that you don't get paid:

Death  
Divorce  
Banks pulling plug  
Change of mind

Husband not agreeing with wife  
Wife not agreeing with husband  
Clients unable to make up minds  
Plus a million other possibilities

So we've now agreed that worded in this way in the agreement; the retainer isn't going to work. This is one of the reasons why I've adapted the wording on all of my agreements with clients. You can see my adapted Client: Architect Agreements in the Appendix if you want to skip forward.

Even this retainer/deposit is a massive leap in mindset for some architects. They just believe the mindset that *a*. You do the work and then *b*. You get paid.

You need to change that mindset right now! The only way forward is with large chunks of money, paid in advance

So now that you've seen that the retainer/deposit model doesn't work; let's look at the next non-functioning method: 50% upfront and then 50% on delivery.

## 9. Why the 50% upfront and 50% on delivery model doesn't work either.

The initial payment in the form of a retainer or deposit 'to get the project started' is shown not to work; what other options are there?

A common method of working (and bear in mind with nearly thirty years in business I've been through all of them) is to get 50% upfront on a work stage and then 50% on delivery. This doesn't work either. Even when you get paid, it destroys cash flow - this is why:

Admittedly you are now looking at a larger percentage upfront but there is still a massive risk that you won't get the other half of the money. Look at the list again:

- Death
- Divorce
- Banks pulling plug
- Change of mind
- Husband not agreeing with wife
- Wife not agreeing with husband
- Clients unable to make up minds
- Plus a million other possibilities

Every time you are considering how you should get paid look at this list. Print the list out and stick it to your computer. Remind yourself that at any stage the project can go 'belly-up' leaving you out of pocket because of the reasons described above. With half of the money paid upfront, you are now at putting yourself at risk for the other half. If I gave you a

million euros/dollars/pounds and then asked whether you would risk half of it on the flip of a coin (the exact same 50:50 risk), you'd be a fool to participate. So why would you participate in the same risk of losing 50% of your money for reasons that are outside your control.

Interestingly I recently had a discussion (via Twitter) regarding this 50:50 payment method with Eric Reinholdt who charges for his plan-set adaptations in this way; here is what he says in Architect+Entrepreneur:

*"The next step is for the customer to purchase the set of plans to modify and a 50% deposit for the modification time estimate I have provided. ...When the design is complete, I notify the customer and they purchase the remaining 50%..."*

It sounds good and in a perfect world it will work; Eric's argument is that he doesn't release the drawings until payment is paid which reduces the risk. This is a misconception; the risk is still the same - 50% of the work could go unpaid through any of the items already described where the client simply doesn't want the drawings anymore. Why put yourself through this risk?

There are several reasons why the 50% upfront: 50% on delivery is so popular:

1. You think that it's fairer to your client
2. It appears more business like
3. Your mindset is telling you this is the best way to work.

Let's give direct answers to these points:

1. Is it fair that the client doesn't pay the remaining 50% because he/she basically doesn't feel like it?
2. Will your accountant think you're more business alike when you don't get paid for 50% of the stage?
3. You need to change your mindset again!

So what is the way to work? I think you can see this coming and it will require you to make the next leap in your mindset: 100% upfront for each work stage.

## 10. The only option is a 100% upfront payment

We've seen that the 50% upfront and 50% on delivery model doesn't work. There can frequently be delays in obtaining that second 50%; from changes to the design (it can be possible for a client to continually ask for changes to deliberately prevent the conclusion to a project), to 'we need to get some prices first' and then we'll pay you. And in my opinion it always creates animosity when the designer insists on the payment priority to the delivery of the drawings.

The easiest way to circumvent that animosity, minimise risk but still get paid in full is with this final and no-brainer method.

Let's now make that final leap in your mindset - I know you can do it!

You need to start thinking about a 100% upfront payment on every work stage.

Working in this way there is 0% risk that at any stage you will be losing money.

Let's look at the reasons why you think you can't work this way?:

1. Your mindset is telling you - it's impossible to get that amount of money upfront without doing the work first
2. Other architects don't work this way
3. I'll never get any work.

And again we answer each point directly:

1. It's only your mindset telling you this. It can be done. This is the way I work and it is proven to work
2. I work this way. You could too.
3. I get plenty of work as I am good at what I do, I am professional and deliver great results. If you work this way you will still get work. All you are doing is reducing the risk of not getting paid.

Notice that what I am asking you to do is to change YOUR mindset; not the clients. The client has no idea what the standard procedure is in the appointment of an architect. Frequently for residential clients it will be the only time that they will work with an architect. So it's up to you to set out the process and payment method, as it is you that knows your business and the way you should work. Not the client. If you leave it to the client you will end up working for free, remember the client had no hesitation in asking you to work for free BEFORE you have even started the job!

This is why I am happy to share this information with other architects and designers, for it is us that need to change the norm and to challenge the standard modus operandi regarding the way we work. It is us that should be dictating how we work, how much and when we should be getting paid - not the client. What I am urging therefore is that we all change our mindsets so that the client understands and expects that he/she will be parting with large amounts of money BEFORE the work is started or progressed. The client then will understand that:

- a. The project doesn't start until the upfront payment is made in full for that work stage and that
- b. The project doesn't progress to the next work stage until that specific work stage has been paid for, in advance and in full; and that
- c. The client understands that this is the normal and standard way that architects now work.

What I am proposing here isn't unique to architects and designers; I am finding that other professionals such as accountants and solicitors work using this method; even trades such as electricians are asking for payment in advance consultation fees on quotations to prevent customers taking their work and obtaining alternative, competitive quotes using their specifications.

Inevitably there will be some clients who won't want to work in this way. Blair Enns describes clients perfectly in 'The Win Without Winning Manifesto' where he outlines why we need to 'diagnose first' and then 'Prescribe'; the principle he describes is exactly the same for why you need to get 100% upfront:

*"The lesson is that the most successful clients, whether owners or executives, have achieved their success in part because of their ability to take control—their ability to rise above and orchestrate others. This is their strength; and even though it is not always in their best interest, it is in their nature...we are the guilty party when we let the client control the engagement"*

This is what I am imploring you to do. Take control of your engagement and your client. This is why you need to ensure

your client increases the amount of 'skin in the game' and at the same time reduces the risk on your side. Remember that the client needs something that a. you can do and b. you are good at. You should control the method in which you get paid.

And if the client doesn't want to play ball then jump ahead to the section on Surfing and 'Wave come. Wave go'.

## 11. The last bit

The 'Last Bit' I'm referring to takes us back to the typical four stages of a residential project:

1. Sketch design
2. Developed design to planning application
3. Detail design and construction/tender information
4. On-site construction, inspection & certification

We've now shown that the only way to get paid is through a 100% upfront payment on EVERY work stage. Let's remind us why:

1. Sketch design

The client has to show 'Skin in the game'; the payment in advance at this stage is a demonstration of this.

1. Developed design to planning application

The client could pull out when they don't get their Planning Permission (remember through reasons beyond your control) leaving you high, dry and unpaid. The payment in full, in advance, is needed at this stage too.

2. Detail design and construction/tender information

The client could still pull out at this stage, remember for a whole host of reasons again beyond your control. This stage is particularly vulnerable as it's when there's the possibility that the construction doesn't match what the bank is lending.

Again this can be beyond your control; I've seen banks change their mortgage offers over the period of the design and pre-construction.

The payment in full, in advance, is needed at this stage too.

### 3. On-site construction, inspection & certification

Now this is the tricky one and it's the one where I too have had to have a massive change in mindset. Let's look at it in more detail along the lines of the traditional architect 'business model':

Traditionally you would be waiting until completion for the payment at this work stage. Even if you have included for a small retainer at the beginning - this is a huge risk and liability. This obviously is untenable in today's climate. The client has a lot of expenditure at this stage in completing the works; his or her mind is focused on getting the kitchen in, money for landscaping ... You, the architect unfortunately, are way down the pecking order of payment priorities. Why wait until the end to get paid?

How about the 50% upfront and 50% on completion model? Better, but you are still left with the risk of non-payment or delay on payment for half of the liability. You are still looking at the same reasons for the client's lack of focus on ensuring he/she pays the architect.

How about 50% upfront and then micro-payments in line with site inspections? Again still better and it's the method I have used until very recently (and my massive change of mindset). The problem with this model is that you are left doing a large

sequence of invoices for very small payments that are difficult to track which you need to keep on top of and, more importantly, keep the client on top of.

So what's left? Yup, you guessed it. The only way this stage can be handled correctly is with a 100% upfront and in advance payment prior to the work commencing. Getting the client to work this way is actually very easy as described earlier your appointment will usually be the first time the client has worked with an architect and it is up to you to explain your *modus operandi*. The hard step will be changing your own mindset to work this way; once that is done life will become easier still in this 'last bit'. In Ireland, with the recent changes to the Building Regulations, this final stage can now be fully quantifiable in times of time and money when you can work out how many visits will be required at specific stages during the progress of the construction.

In reality it's very easy for the client to work this way as you have already shown that you have already completed three previous work stages with up-front payments. You are continuing the same working method (which makes the process very straightforward) and you have already shown that you will complete the work, without disappearing when paid in advance.

## 12. That first phone call or email

Let's rewind a little. Back to that very, first initial telephone call or email from a prospective client.

Prospective Client: *"I am thinking about getting an architect to do x,y,z and was wondering when you could come over to see it and to give me a few ideas"*

Rule: Remember that you're always busy. Even when you are not.

Rule: Remember that you're in a people-person job so you don't want to come across as the rudest person on the planet.

There is, therefore a fine balance over listening to the client but at the same time trying to ascertain whether they are a viable client. I think that it's inevitable that you will have to listen to the project and this initial conversation is seen as part of the sales process. Jane Leach has a great way of looking at this:

*"We have a chat by phone and I explain what I can do for them... then hopefully they will book me in for a home design consultation and we go from there. If not, then end of story and I've just had a coffee and a chat for 10-20 minutes on the phone, while I rest my eyes from the screen or do some filing."*

This phone conversation needs to be kept very brief and constantly tell yourself "How do I 'triage' this person into my services or products". Based on the conversation you need to be moving in one of the following ways:

1. Prospective Client: *“Can you come over to show us examples of your work”*

You: *“There are stacks of examples of a wide range of work on my website”*

2. Prospective Client: *“When can you visit the house to see what you can do for us?”*

You: *“I’m incredibly busy at the moment and I’d love to take the project on; the best way to take this project forward is:”*

Then you’re matching the client to the service or product:

- A paid initial consultation
- A paid house visit and design service
- A paid feasibility study
- An online e-commerce page with a (paid for) similar design and options for stock plan

I remember one of the candidates in The Apprentice with Sir Alan Sugar who spent ages talking to no-hopers at a trade show and was admonished for wasting time when the customer had no intention of buying anything. Take a leaf therefore from Sir Alan’s book - keep this conversation or email to a minimum with the goal being to match them quickly into a service or product that pays. These telephone conversations can have the tendency to drag on when the prospective client will love to regale you with tales of the family, stories about the house - everyone has a story to tell and your job is to cut to the chase and move them from story-tellers into paying customers and clients.

The previous phone conversation takes a diversion:

Prospective Client: *"How do I know whether I can work with you? Can't you do a few designs to see if we like them and whether we can work together?"*

You: *"I'm really sorry, I can't do designs for free; this is my business and I'm incredibly busy at the moment on paying jobs."* In the back of your mind you're thinking of the unsaid rules:

Rule: *"You don't work for free."*

Rule: *"You're incredibly busy, with paying clients - even when you're not"*

Rule: *"Any prospective client can see examples of your work online, direct them there"*

Rule: *"You don't need to meet up to see if you can 'get on'. This 'getting on' can be ascertained in any of the services or products you're directing them to"*

I think this concept of meeting up to see if you can 'get on' is a fallacy; the bottom line is that you're providing services or goods to paying customers and clients; you're not marrying them or entering a best friends contest together. Jane Leach uses this initial telephone conversation as this "Getting on" interaction:

*"people who advise clients that it's all about personality and that you need to meet your architect to know that you will get on - yes it's true to an extent but I find that you can tell a lot about someone over the phone"*

I don't believe it's actually possible to see if you can get on in any type of initial meeting; the relationship between architect and client is a lot like marriage in that you don't notice any annoying habits until much later. I believe I am a reasonable person and will do my utmost to behave in a courteous and polite manner to all clients; I also have to work to a code of conduct where I'm expected to work in a professional manner with my clients. Remember that the client does not have to work to a similar 'Code of Conduct' so you should be prepared for any 'Clients from Hell'. Don't believe me? Visit the website of the same name:

<http://clientsfromhell.net>

Jane Leach continues that it may be in the clients best interest for you NOT to get on:

*"Also, it's not always true - some fairly obnoxious people prove to be amazing designers so it may well be that having someone who's a bit annoying to work with but who has a good design track record could actually be the best architect for you!"*

### 13. What's the second most important thing that a client can give you?

If you've got this far then you can probably guess that the first most important thing that the client can give you is their money.

The next most important thing is their time. It sounds unbelievable that a client appoints an architect for their project and yet doesn't allocate enough time to work with their architect and their project. Yet this is frequently the case. We have already seen that:

*"Most successful clients, whether owners or executives have achieved their success in part because of their ability to take control—their ability to rise above and orchestrate others."*

Successful clients have achieved their success through their ability to take control. Successful clients are also generally very busy people. Incredibly they are often too busy to meet with you or to progress their project. This concept of the client being too busy to meet with you is important as frequently if they are too busy to meet with you to work through the design then they are also too busy to pay you.

This brings us neatly back to the premise that the only way forward is through the 100% upfront payment for the stage. This entire upfront payment (for the stage) for 'too busy' clients means that:

You don't need to stress about when the client is available to meet or pay you as they've already paid you in advance

You don't need to stress about finalising the design to ensure payment as the client has already paid you in advance.

You don't need to stress about cashflow and invoices not getting paid as the client has already paid you in advance.

## 14. Star baseball players don't take their eye off the ball

This 'star tip' is related to baseball but I believe it's original use was related to golf.

That is: *"Keep your eye on the ball"*

But what do I mean in a business context? Through this book I've given working business models that will help you achieve specific aims; these principally are:

- 1, How to deal with people that will end up being tyre kickers, 'unsures', water-testers, ponderers or dreamers.
2. How to minimise the risk of non-payment when a project or client flounders due to reasons outside your control.

You've worked hard to change your mindset regarding these two key game changers but you can't take it easy - now the key rule is that you don't take your eye off the ball.

You've set the rules. You're in control of the project. You've triaged the clients into the best fit for your services or products. Now don't back down and relinquish control of the project.

By all means negotiate to get the job but at all times, you still need to maintain control. Remember what Blair Enns says; that successful people have achieved their success because of their ability to take control. The moment you relinquish control and let the client take command is when the entire

project starts to suffer. If you let the client take control at the very beginning when the terms are being agreed it will be inevitable that they will also take control throughout the design stage. Remember, it's you that's the architect. It's you that has the design training. It is you that needs to take control in the best interest of the client so that they get the best possible work from you. Continually remind yourself that you are being tough in order to help the client, to make sure that they get the best possible project for their money. So stay tough, don't take your eye off the ball and don't deviate ever from the rules I'm giving.

Looking back on the projects that have failed (and inevitably over nearly thirty years in business there have been failures), there have been a vast percentage where I relinquished that control; whether it's letting the client dictate the design (inevitably the design has been poorer) or changing the payment terms, I can look back on these projects and remember projects where either the client has bust my balls from day one or simply ended up not paying what was due. So again I remind you to keep your eye on the ball. Set your rules and then stick to them.

Continuing the baseball analogy; what if the clients don't want to "play ball" and refuse to work under your business model?:

1. Explain it's in their best interest in order to get the best work from you and to ensure you run a profitable company that won't go bust half way through the project.
2. Remind yourself that in order to do the best work it is you that needs to stay in control
3. You'll read later about surfers and 'wave come, wave

go'. Don't let clients who won't play ball break your heart. Let them go and move onto the next client. Stay in control.

Apologies for mixing the metaphors but clients are a lot like girlfriends or boyfriends in that the more desperate you are, the more unlikely it will be to actually obtain one. Nobody likes desperation; whether it's dating or clients; clients can smell desperation in designers in much the same way that girls/boys can smell desperation in their dates. What's also similar is the phrase that girl/boy friends are a lot like buses in that you can wait for ages for one and then several can come along at once. Why is this? It's to do with confidence in that once you have got yourself a girl/boyfriend then your are exuding the confidence to get you another at the same time. This advice does not apply to happily married men or women and is not an encouragement to marital infidelity!

This brings us neatly on to the next heading. Stars have confidence and so should you!

15. Stars have confidence and so should you.

The training you have undertaken to get this far should have helped in your confidence; there is no other profession where your confidence is continually tested, where you have to present your work and then have it torn apart through the 'crit' system. But you now need to step up the confidence. Confidence is required in order for any type of star whether it's an actor, musician or sports person to achieve great things. You need to harness this confidence from the beginning to the end:

Confidence in knowing that you can design well and then deliver

Confidence that you should ask to be paid what you are worth  
Confidence in taking control at all stages, from the beginning to the end

Confidence in knowing that you can turn away a client who doesn't want to play by your rules

But where does this confidence come from?

I guess some are born with it; myself it's taken a long time, a lot of heartbreak and a lot of mistakes and failures along the way before I can feel confident in all the areas described above. Hopefully, you will find this confidence through reading this book faster than I ever did.

It's beyond the scope of this book to give proposals on how to gain confidence as an architect but there are a few tips I have found online that will help you on the way:

Sustainable Cities Collective

(<http://www.sustainablecitiescollective.com/bloomingrock/1137599/how-build-confidence-architect-tips-4-women-architects>)

was written specifically for women, the advice, however, applies equally to men lacking in this department. The article includes two great pieces of advice:

1. Over time I've found that confidence doesn't come from being perfect and knowing everything, but from a deep reserve within that we can draw on when things get tough and
2. Trust your gut and 'You typically know more than you think'

It's this second point that is critical when having control in the project and over a client. As we've already discussed, successful people want to control the project. They want to control you as the architect. If you let them they will also control your design. They will make you doubt the design decisions that you instinctively know are correct and things that you know don't work will pop into the 'clients' design without you even realising. So, be confident. You know more than you think and trust your gut. The client should be paying you to make the right design designs; not the other way round! Take control and make the right design decisions. As well as getting a better result at the end of the day; you will also be gaining client respect that you are passionate about what you do and that you will stick to your guns.

This 'sticking to your guns' also applies at the business end of architecture and is also explained in the section 'Don't take your eye off the ball' – it takes courage and confidence to not

waver ensuring you get paid in the way you control. Again, trust your gut; eventually, over time, you'll be able to sift the tyre kickers and dreamers from the real clients. Doing great design and building a viable business isn't easy; as my own architectural hero Glenn Murcutt says:

*"I'm totally vulnerable. I have the confidence to know that if I work at it hard enough, I'll get a good solution. I know when the thing is still bad, it's very easy to be very bad as an architect, it's very very easy. It is very hard to do things really well."*

Architecture is hard, it takes time and hard work to get it right. The statement by Murcutt was written in the context of designing but it could equally apply to running a viable and profitable architectural business.

Another great article on confidence comes from Diane Jacobs where she gives 20 tips on becoming more confident as an architect:

<http://bloomingrock.com/2015/12/27/how-to-build-confidence-as-an-architect-part-ii/>

My favourite tip from this piece is:

*"Know who you are and who you are not"*

I can only give advice from my own standpoint; I put a great value (some may say too much) on my time and it annoys me greatly when people waste it. It's not that I don't give people time; if you work with me I will 'bust a gut' working hard and doing my best for you. As Glenn Murcutt said, I also have the confidence to know that I'll also get a good solution when I

work hard at it. This is the person that I know I am; someone that works hard for the right client and not someone to have his time wasted. It may be that you don't feel this way and that you are happy to give hour upon hour of your time to 'tyre-kickers' and don't feel aggrieved in the way that I do; I, unfortunately, cannot.

You may also be the person that sees no point in the effort and work involved in setting up Passive Income revenue streams as recommended by Eric Reinholdt – this is the choice that you need to make. What's essential as Diane Jacobs says is that you know who you are [and how you want to work] and who you are not [and how you do not want to work] – the choice is yours.

## 16. But what about the art!

Money, money, money. That's all you're talking about! What about the art, what about your integrity as an artist!

Firstly unless you're getting paid, you're not in business and if you're not in business you won't be creating any art!

We had a great Practice & Management Lecturer on the architecture course who asked the young and eager students:

*"What is the purpose of you being an architect?"*

The answers were typical of the young and eager architectural minds:

*"To create spaces to create emotions in the people that experience them"*

*"To create homes for people to feel safe in"*

And other such lovely phrases.

No, the answer the lecturer gave was that the purpose of you being an architect was:

*"To stop your children becoming green and wrinkly through malnutrition"*

And that's the crux; your primary objective is to keep the money coming in and to keep the business going. Actually, it's the exact opposite of what you'd expect; you are able to

concentrate more on the art when you know that you don't have to worry about the money. A huge weight is taken off your shoulders when you know that you don't have to worry about if and when you will get paid. This weight removed then allows you to give more concentration on your art, design and architecture.

## 17. Stars think about the work they take on and don't get type-cast

The previous chapters have explained the benefits of the large upfront payment but it's also important to understand that the star chooses his/her work very carefully. Sometimes there may be a project that you could reduce your fee on. As I mentioned previously Tom Hanks swapped his fee for 'Saving Private Ryan' in exchange for a share in the profits; but this option for you is more problematic and the world is full of potential clients trying to get your fees either for nothing or very cheaply. There is only one reason why you may wish to consider reducing your fee:

*There is an artistic reason that you have the opportunity to explore architectural ideas that would not be possible otherwise.*

It's important to emphasise that at no stage am I recommending this fee reduction as part of a 'race to the bottom' when comparing your fees to your peers around you. Plus you have to be very careful that you aren't exploring these ideas for a client that is well able to afford your fees and pay for these fees upfront.

In much the same way that actors can become typecast when they become well known for a certain role; it is very easy to become type cast for the type of work that you take on. This is why you need to be very careful when choosing your work and who you work with. Have an idea before you take on any work about the type of business you want to be doing.

It may be that you enjoy doing the same type of work for long

periods; the analogy would be the 'soap-opera' actor who performs as the same person often for decades. If you are this type of architect then it's perfect; if you are not then be careful over the type of work you start your career with as it can be these projects that define you and your work.

What can you do if you end up 'type-cast' doing the same projects over and over again and you're looking to undertake something different? The answer is in other stars who 'reinvent' them selves; look at the careers of David Bowie, Madonna and even Kylie Minogue who have had a variety of styles that last many years through the reinvention of themselves. You effectively will have to do the same; tear up the rule book and figure out the steps you must take in your reinvention. These steps are beyond the realms of this book and will vary from person to person in much the same way the various guises of David Bowie were different to those of Madonna.

## 18. A star gets everything in writing

You are required to have your contract agreed with your client as part of your Professional Code of Conduct. But it's important that this 'Agreement in writing' covers everything and I mean everything of all possible eventualities. The problem is that many things can go wrong in the course of events and it's critical that these 'events' are catered for and that there is a route to be taken when a diversion is taken in the project.

This philosophy is also essential for 'stars' in their contracts; take Meryl Streep for example:

The filming of 'Dancing at Lughnasa' in 1998 suffered a few delays, which kept Streep in Ireland longer than the planned two weeks. Although the film company promised verbally the shoot would be complete in 2 weeks the days stretched to an additional three and then another four weeks.

"I was spitting furious and it taught me that you get everything in writing and you make them sign."

It's not only when things go wrong that this all-encompassing contract is required; it removes any misunderstandings that occur during the project and also anything further down the line. Instances of these misunderstandings that have occurred in my own work have been numerous over the years and include:

When payments are due - see throughout this book why this is critical;

Exactly what you will and what you won't be doing at every stage of the project;  
Copyright of drawings;  
Right to photograph the project;  
What happens when the shit hits the fan;  
Resolution of any disputes.

A good agreement between yourself and your client should cover all of these aspects thoroughly and succinctly; the agreement we use (totaling only 5 pages) is included in the Appendix.

## 19. A star isn't helpful

Some of the best actors in the world have 'difficult' reputations. That is they are renowned for being 'difficult' to work with. That is they can come across as not being too helpful. Take Dustin Hoffman for example; where he was perceived by a handful of directors (consider the amount of films Hoffman has made) as being 'difficult'. As Hoffman once said in an interview "Difficult, or meticulous? Maybe they are one in the same," Nobody can doubt Hoffman's meticulous attention to detail in his preparation and delivery of a role. In Marathon Man for example Hoffman deprived himself of sleep for days at a time and let his body become disheveled and unhealthy in order to put himself in the mindset of a man losing control. This is professionalism. And what is required from you is a similar level of professionalism in the work you undertake.

Why is this 'professionalism' relevant in the design world? Every difficulty that has arisen with my own clients can be stemmed back to me being too helpful. When you try and become too helpful and try to solve client's problems in a way that is easier for them yet is not the absolute correct course of action the result will be problems. It's the exact opposite of what you may want to do. Architects are generally caring people and want to solve problems. But you should only solve them in the most professional way that you can. In every single action you undertake in your work and your interactions with clients you need to ask yourself "Is this the correct course of action, is this the most professional thing I can do?" and if the answer is no then you may be lucky and get away with it but generally (if you're me that always gets

found out) I can guarantee that problems will arise at a later date. These problems may not occur instantly, they can raise their ugly heads years down the line at a date in the future which could have been avoided if you took the most professional course of action.

This professionalism and dedication can come across as 'difficult' in the same way as Hoffman described above. I was explaining this concept to a fellow professional recently (a doctor actually) and I emphasised that this way of working doesn't mean you're unfriendly, just that you are professional and that some of the decisions you make are in the best interest of the client and the project; even if they don't see it this way at the time. You can see the same analogy in the acting world where the 'difficult' actor is just being meticulous and working in the best interest of the film, which at the time the director may not fully appreciate

## 20. A star is born & The Theory of Marginal Gains

Forget the Barbara Streisand film 'A Star is Born'; you may get lucky and hit it big first time but the reality is that you're going to have to put in a bit of legwork first. This is where the theory of marginal gains comes into play. The theory is well known but was pushed further when Dave Brailsford, the General Manager of the Sky Pro Cycling Team (the stars of cycling I guess) explained the theory to the team:

*"Aggregation of marginal gains." He explained it as "the 1 percent margin for improvement in everything you do." His belief was that if you improved every area related to cycling by just 1 percent, then those small gains would add up to remarkable improvement.*

They started by optimizing the things you might expect: the nutrition of riders, their weekly training program, the ergonomics of the bike seat, and the weight of the tires.

But Brailsford and his team didn't stop there. They searched for 1 percent improvements in tiny areas that were overlooked by almost everyone else: discovering the pillow that offered the best sleep and taking it with them to hotels, testing for the most effective type of massage gel, and teaching riders the best way to wash their hands to avoid infection. They searched for 1 percent improvements everywhere.

Brailsford believed that if they could successfully execute this strategy, then Team Sky would be in a position to win the Tour de France in five years time.

He was wrong. They won it in three years.”

You can read more on this theory of marginal gains at:

<http://jamesclear.com/marginal-gains>

The exact same theory applies in business and can be applied to your design or architectural business:

The Marginal Gains of Business:

Monetise everything that you can. Services that are outside of what you would normally expect to provide should be paid for. Every single thing that your business does needs to generate income.

Monetising also includes monetising the website - anything that you can sell online - sell! This includes: Google Ads, e-books, software, hints/tips, guides, courses.

Create a passive income. This is what I’m doing here with this book; when the book sales of several books are added together you get a reasonable addition to your income.

Reduce expenditure and waste: get better deals on your services bills, only buy what you really need; buy at trade prices for stationery. As the saying goes “Look after the pennies and the pounds will look after themselves” - think of every single marginal gain that you can make in your business in order for them to add up to “a remarkable improvement”

## 21. The 'Star' of surfing and how surfing applies to architects

The first 'Star' of surfing is widely alleged to be Duke Kahanamoku from New Zealand. 'Duke', the champion Hawaiian Olympic swimmer is widely credited with bringing modern surfing to the Western World over a 100 years ago. You can read more about this superstar of surfing in the autobiography by David Davis:

<http://www.amazon.com/Waterman-Life-Times-Duke-Kahanamoku/dp/0803254776/>

Kahanamoku was born in 1890 and raised in Honolulu, a full-blooded Hawaiian, and the first-born son of a delivery clerk. In 1912, while returning from the Olympics, he brought surfing to the American East Coast, with exhibitions in New Jersey's Atlantic City; in late 1914 and early 1915, Kahanamoku introduced the Hawaiian form of surfing to Australia and New Zealand with demonstrations that attracted thousands; from 1915 to the early '30s, he helped popularize surfing in Southern California.

In 1965 and with surfing known around the world, Kahanamoku would reflect on the sport he showed the world:

*"You know, there are so many waves coming in all the time, you don't have to worry about that. Take your time - wave come. Let the other guys go. Catch another one."*

So how does this quote and surfing in general apply to architects?:

1. There will be plenty of projects in your career in the same way that there are waves in the sea. Don't beat yourself up for 'missing' a project - wave come - wave go
2. Don't beat yourself up when another architect gets the job you wanted. Wave come - wave go

But what if there are no waves (projects) out there? Think what the 'star' surfers would do. They certainly wouldn't be in the water trying to surf when there are apparently no waves to be had. They'd be doing other things instead:

Chilling with friends

Staying fit

Getting prepared for when there are waves (projects)

Think of other things that bring in income

Think like a cool surfer - don't beat yourself up when there are no projects (waves); sometimes there just aren't any projects to be had and it's pointless going out trying to find them. Go and do something else but keep in the back of your mind that you need to be prepared for when the waves come back (as they always do). If there are no waves, take time to relax and prepare yourself for when it get's super-busy (as it will); use this time to chill before you will be working flat out again. Remember that the economics of architecture and building are in cycles; you'll have good times and bad so when you're in a bad time - chill and prepare for when it get's busier - don't try going out in the water when there is no surf!.

A farmer's proverb is also applicable here:

*"Make hay when the sun shines"*

When times are good, work hard to make the most of the current position. But equally if things are quiet, prepare yourself for when they get busier. Remember all of the other advice - there's no need to go chasing projects at a lower price; hold firm and treat the way you handle work in the slack times EXACTLY the same as when they are booming. A similar Latin saying is *Carpe Diem*: Seize the day; when it's booming seize the work and money and when there are no waves - prepare for when there are.

## 22. Stars are people too you know - why it pays to be decent

Stars are people, as well you know! As well as the well-known tales of stars acting like prima-donnas and being hated in the industry there are countless other stories of the stars who have tirelessly helped others and have been incredible examples to everyone they meet. One such unbelievable star was Robin Williams (RIP); a brilliant actor, gifted comedian, a loving father, and a kind man dedicated to charitable causes. An incredible example of his charity was that when other stars demanded only blue M&M's or private jets in their 'Riders'; Robin would stipulate that for every single event or film he did, the company hiring him also had to hire a certain number of homeless people working on the set.

Now my philosophy on life is simple; when you travel life's highway, do you want everyone that you meet to say that you were a decent human being or a complete dick-head. The choice is simple - in every interaction that you have on a daily basis; with family, friends, colleagues and strangers - do you want to be a dick-head or do you want to be a decent person.

There's no reason why adopting any of the advice in this book can turn you into a dickhead; in fact the opposite will happen; when you run your business professionally and in the same way a star would be professional (but at the same time think smart) you can run your business in a more professional and profitable manner. Also, running your business in this way will gain you more respect; when you work in a professional manner you gain professional respect.

I'm not a religious person and I guess the theory of Karma and 'What goes around comes around' may be a load of baloney; but I'd rather not take the risk. Even if you believe or don't believe in Karma, there's no excuse for not being a decent person.

Imagine walking along the road and someone on the opposite side sees you; would you like them to say:

"Ah there goes xyz, what a complete dick-head" or:

"There goes a decent person"

## 23. You and stars are in 'people-person' jobs

Continuing on from 'Stars are People' you need to remember that being a star or an architect is a 'people-person' job. You need to know how to interact with people, work with and then get along with people. Let's look at the way a star is cast in a film; remember 'Stars don't audition':

1. The director is looking for someone to cast in his film
2. He researches who he wants and picks a specific star to do his film
3. He picks the star on the basis that he/she can do the job and is right for the film
4. They negotiate, agree a price and the film is completed

Now let's look at the same process when a client chooses an architect:

1. The *client* is looking for someone to *design his project*
2. He researches who he wants and picks a specific *architect* to do his *project*
3. He picks the *architect* on the basis that he/she can do the job and is right for the *project*
4. They negotiate; agree a price and the *project* is completed.

The processes are identical!

What you will notice is that it's only the final step where money is discussed. There's a lot of preparatory thinking, researching and picking that goes on before money is discussed. Therefore there is no need to be discussing prices, giving cheap prices or dropping prices on Day One. If the

client really wants you then they will pay for you. And if the client can't afford you remember the surfing analogy previously '*Wave come, wave go*'.

Remember again 'Stars don't audition'. Do you see anywhere that the star does the complete film free of charge just to make sure that he can do it? No. Stars don't have to audition or send in audition tapes and neither do you. Let's look again at the director picking a star process that does not involve an audition:

1. The director is looking for someone to cast in his film
2. He researches who he wants and picks a specific star to do his film
3. He picks the star on the basis that he/she can do the job and is right for the film

The Director knows exactly what the star has done previously. The director knows exactly the type of work already done based on his filmography. The director knows whether he could work with the star based on reports from fellow Directors.

1. They negotiate, agree a price and the film is completed

Now the following process is what you need to get to:

1. The *client* is looking for someone to *design his project*
2. He researches who he wants and picks a specific *architect* to do his *project*
3. He picks the *architect* on the basis that he/she can do the job and is right for the *project*

The *client* knows exactly what the *architect* has done previously. The *client* knows exactly the type of work already done based on his *catalogue of built works* (shown on the website). The *client* knows whether he could work with the *architect* based on reports from other *clients*. (Either through word of mouth or testimonials on the website)

1. They negotiate, agree a price and the *project* is completed.

What's interesting is that although I've said that architecture is a 'people-person' job, and it is. There are many different types of people in the world. Some of them you will get on with and inevitably there will be some that you won't. Say thank you for the ones that you get on with well and say 'Wave come, wave go' for the ones that you don't.

If you look at the processes again; I have found that when the client has decided to look for someone, undertaken research to find someone and then picked you to complete the job; you would have to do something incredibly stupid NOT to get the job. Bear in mind that if you are offering a premium product and the client quibbles about the price then let them go elsewhere; remember 'Wave come, wave go'.

## 24. Aren't you talking about Starchitects?

If you've read as far as this you may be think "Is he talking about Starchitects?". Not exactly. What I'm talking about is thinking like a star and adopting the same principles in your business life as an star.

Although saying that there are definite areas of overlap between 'Starchitects' and 'thinking like a star'; we therefore have to explain first what a starchitect is:

starchitect

'sta:kitekt/

*nouninformalderogatory*

noun: **starchitect**; plural noun: **starchitects**

1. a famous or high-profile architect.

Essentially 'Starchitect' is the blend of the word 'star' and architect

Conrad Newel has a great blog where he has great detail on what a starchitect is, how to become one and how to stay one:

<http://famousarchitect.blogspot.ie>

Conrad has a great piece on his blog about how Starchitects are shameless about asking for things:

<http://famousarchitect.blogspot.ie/2010/08/69-be-shameless-about-asking-for-things.html>

The blog post is concluded with the final scene from one of his favorite movies: *My Cousin Vinny*; about an inexperienced lawyer who has a lot of raw talent but wanted to win his first trial on his own; without asking for help from anybody. In short he wanted to do things the hard way.

What I'm saying in this book is rather than making things unnecessarily hard on yourself by racing around after people, being too helpful and in essence being unprofessional; take a leaf out of the Starchitect's book by making life easier on yourself and ask for things from other people when you need it. And then don't feel as if you're taking the easy way or are less of a person when you do.

## 25. Putting it together - an example

So let's put all that we have learnt into practice in an example:

You are constantly getting requests for free advice; you take your time effort and energy into answering knowing full-well that they won't develop into actual work.

### **The rule of not working for free:**

Don't do work for free. Why should you give this advice away for free when others have to pay for it. You are now being fairer to all rather than just being difficult.

### **The rule of monetisation:**

If you can provide this question answering service at a fee then monetise your website to develop this as an income stream.

### **The rule of win-win**

Always work towards the win-win scenario.

By thinking in this way everyone wins; especially you.

1. Clients win by being treated equally
2. You win by developing an additional income stream
3. You win again by not having to deal with work you're not getting paid for or that will develop into actual work
4. The client wins by getting their question answered.

## **The rule of not being too helpful:**

It's so easy to think that you have to go through life being helpful to everyone. Being too helpful takes away time from the people that deserve it; time for yourself, your family and for clients that are actually paying for your services.

What have you got to lose?

You're not getting any work from it anyway and the worse that can happen if the monetisation doesn't work is that you won't have to waste your time giving free advice. You don't have to be rude to do this; just point the questioners to the paying part of the web site.

Ringo Starr had a similar problem with fans and from October 20th decided that he was unable to sign autographs, objects or fan mail after this date. What's great is that he tried to do this in a 'Peace and Love' style: here is what he said:

*'Peace and love, peace and love. I want to tell you that post after the 20th of October, do not send fanmail to any address you have. NOTHING will be signed after 20th of October, if that has a date on it after it's going to be tossed.*

*'I'm warning you with peace and love I have too much to do. So no more fan mail. Thank you, thank you. And no objects to be signed, nothing. Peace and love, peace and love.'*

## 26. Putting it together - another example

So let's put all that we have learnt into practice in another example:

A client rings you and requests that you to drive out to see him ASAP as he's trying to pick an architect and wants you to do a 'trial' design to see if he likes it.

### **The rule of not working for free:**

How many more times will I have to say it? No working for free! Remember, Stars don't audition.

### **The rule of always being busy, even when you're not:**

You're too busy to race out in the car to meet the client. Even if you're not 'that' busy your time is precious and by racing out and giving something away for nothing is taking away from another client who is paying for your services. Every time you race out on a speculative call like this, it's taking you away from doing paying work in the office.

### **The rule of monetisation:**

So how do you get the client and project without the racing out and working for free? The secret is monetisation. I have been through this endless cycle of meeting no-hope clients and wasting time and effort. I made the decision that the only way of moving forward was to monetise this initial procedure. There are numerous problems with the 'racing out for free' business model:

1. You could be racing out on a job that is totally irrelevant to the work that you actually do.
2. You could be racing out to see a job where the client has no budget or interest to actually appoint you (known as tyre-kickers in the trade)
3. You could be racing out just for the 'client' to pick your brains and get some free advice
4. You may not be the right 'fit' for the client or the project.

Therefore the trick is monetise the process; there are numerous ways of doing this which I've described earlier, namely:

Provide a 'Home Design Consultation' where the project is evaluated and an outline brief is formed on completion.

Provide a 'Design Workshop' - Similar to the above but goes into more depth regarding the sketch designs and possible ideas.

Provide a feasibility study - rather than jumping straight into design another option is to provide a feasibility study service where the emphasis is on whether the project is feasible from a budgetary and planning standpoint. The problem I have found with this is that clients still ask for a 'full' design as part of this feasibility study; again you need 'balls of steel' explaining what this service is and is not.

A simple fee per initial consultation. This is the model I am now adopting (after working through all of the above!). It's a straightforward 'Initial consultation' fee which is a small

amount that covers:

Whether the project, client and architect are a good fit

The outline of what is required

At the end gives a breakdown of the services and costs for going further

The meeting in our office; the benefit of not driving is immense in savings on petrol and time. We have access to Google StreetView and historic maps that we would not have at the site.

Access to whether the client is serious or not; especially when you consider the cost of this initial nominal payment

All of these 'Initial' services are monetised and could be purchased online; adopting this model is the perfect way of implementing an additional revenue stream (which before would have been given away for free), to judge whether a client is serious and to kick-start a project. All without leaving the office and driving hundreds of miles!

**The rule of 'Wave come - Wave go':**

So what do you do if the 'client' won't go for your 'monetised proposal'? Remember the surfer motto: 'Wave come. Wave go'. Keep firm, don't waver and move onto the next client who will go this way. It may be that you will lose a few possible clients when you adopt this method but the benefits overall are immense:

1. A huge reduction in wasted time and effort
2. A huge reduction in your stress levels
3. A feeling of empowerment and 'being in control'
4. An increase in initial and on-going fee income.

**The rule of 'Stars Don't Audition':**

Your body of work should be so impressive that you don't have to prove yourself again that you can handle a specific design for a specific client. Do you think Leonardo DiCaprio has to audition every single time for a movie to 'prove' that he can do it. No.

## 27. A star does their own thing anyway

Part of being a star is that they do their own thing and forges their own route through life. Whether in music or in acting; the star doesn't need to listen to the director or the producer. He or she is the star and has the confidence to know what is right or wrong.

So you can now throw away this book. You have now read this and hopefully some of the pages will have been of benefit. But these are the skills and techniques that I have learnt over many years and have worked for me. They may or they may not work for you. Your business may be based on a different model and strategy, or you may not have the 'balls of steel' to implement what can be quite tough ways of working.

So forge your own path, you'll need to make your own mistakes and hopefully some of what I have written will have been of benefit.

## 28. Conclusion

Well done for making it this far; if you've followed all the methods and tips you will have learnt critical skills in ensuring you keep control of a project and retain your sanity throughout the design and construction cycle.

In summary the key aspects that you are addressing in 'Working like a star' are that what you think maybe perfect clients could turn out to be any of the following:

Tyre kickers,  
Unsure  
Water testers  
Ponderers  
Dreamers

And your job is to either remove these from your time and effort through the principle of chargeable consultations or to triage (a perfect word and description so a big thanks to Eric Reinholdt) into other products or services.

And then you need to constantly remind yourself that a project can stop at any stage for reasons beyond your control; some of these reasons (in my experience) have been:

Death  
Divorce  
Banks pulling plug  
Change of mind  
Husband not agreeing with wife  
Wife not agreeing with husband

Clients unable to make up minds

And it is for these reasons that you need to minimise financial risk by ensuring every stage is paid in advance; at no stage should you be at risk of the project collapsing and you not getting paid.

Now that I have written down my thoughts regarding how you can run your business it has clarified in my mind what I need to do in order to run mine better. For it is when things are written down 'in black and white' that you have a better understanding of what you should be doing. So I thank you for the opportunity in helping me to develop my business in a more business minded manner. It's taken nearly 30 years in business to realise this!

## 29. Further Reading

I've compiled a list of further reading and websites that will take you further in 'Working like a star':

1. Win Without Pitching, Blair Enns -  
<https://www.winwithoutpitching.com>

2. <http://www.archipreneur.com/> and

Architect + Entrepreneur available on Amazon at:

<http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/1511750170/>

by <http://entresearchitect.com>

3. <http://entresearchitect.com/> by Mark R. LePage

### 30. Appendix A - Agreement for Services

Agreement between Client and Architect  
for **D o m e s t i c** Work

\_\_\_\_\_ (Client) :

Appoints: Mark Stephens Architects as architects for:

Description of works:

\_\_\_\_\_ (Address of project):

on the terms and conditions in this document.

The architect will provide the client with the services at [A].  
The client will pay the architect the charges at [B]

The undersigned acknowledges that they have read this agreement, fully understand the agreement, agree to be bound by the agreement, including the terms and conditions and have received a copy of the agreement.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ (Client) \_\_\_\_\_ (Date)

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ (Architect) \_\_\_\_\_ (Date)

## **[A] SERVICES TO BE PROVIDED**

### **Work Stage 1: Initial Design and Feasibility (25% of total charge)**

Discuss scope of service, charges and content of client-architect agreement.

Work with the client to establish the brief for the project, to include discussion of client's wishes as to accommodation, quality, cost and time.

Agree communication methods, and person authorised to give client instructions to the architect.

Agree approximate project timescale.

Examine the site and make an initial appraisal of its architectural possibilities.

Prepare outline design proposal to respond to client's requirements for the project.

Present the proposal to the client and discuss its implications.

Provide initial advice on project cost.

Advise on the need for specialist consultants.

Advise on planning, building and safety and health regulations insofar as these bear on the project.

Agree project estimated cost, scope of service and architect's charges in writing.

Make a formal or informal pre-planning enquiry (if required)

**Work Stage 2: Developed Design (25% of total charge)**

Further consider the brief and the site, and based on the outline proposal and further discussions with the client, develop the design for the project.

Prepare further sketch drawings to illustrate the developed design.

Incorporate statutory requirements of planning, building and safety and health regulations as appropriate to this stage of the project.

Incorporate into the project the work of any specialist consultants.

Present the developed proposal to the client and discuss its implications.

Provide further advice on project cost and timescale in writing.

If planning permission is required for the project, make the application.

NOTE: Receiving Planning Permission cannot guaranteed

### **Work Stage 3: Detail Design (30% of total charge)**

Develop the detail design for the project, including construction details, site works, finishes and fittings as appropriate at this stage of the project.

Prepare project technical and quality specifications.

Further incorporate the detail work of any consultants.

Further incorporate statutory requirements and any changes as required under a Grant of Planning Permission as appropriate to this stage of the project.

Prepare Forms of Tender for main and any specialist subcontracts.

Advise client on provisions of RIAI Forms of Building Contracts.

Advise client on insurance implications and procedures during construction.

Prepare lists of contractors for tendering or negotiating purposes.

Circulate material to tenderers, invite competitive tenders.

#### **Work Stage 4: Construction (20% of total charge)**

Report on tenders received and advise client on how to proceed.

Arrange building contract between client and building contractor.

Visit the site as appropriate to inspect generally the progress and quality of the work and see that the contractor is fulfilling his obligations to the client.

Modify the design in response to site conditions, if required.

When construction work accords with the contract documents, issue the client with certificates of payment due to the contractor.

Value the final account for the works.

Inspect the work at the end of the building contract defects liability period.

List any defects then requiring remedial work by contractor and inspect contractor's making good of defects.

Issue final certificate.

Issue Opinion on Compliance with Planning and Building Regulations in format agreed between RIAI and the Law Society of Ireland.

## **[B] CHARGES**

The charge is to be:

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Below is the payment schedule in accordance with the work stage percentages described at [A]:

Work Stage 1: **Payment of stage in full in advance**

Work Stage 2: **Payment of stage in full in advance**

Work Stage 3: **Payment of stage in full in advance**

Work Stage 4: **Payment of stage in full in advance.**

The hourly rate for any time charges for principals is €\*\* per hour and for technical staff €\*\* per hour

Value Added Tax at the standard rate (at present 23%) is applicable on all charges.

The charges above do not include the following expenses:

- OS/Land Registry Maps
- Soil investigations/percolation tests/reports
- Newspaper Planning Notices
- Council Planning Application/Commencement Notice fees
- RIAI forms/contracts
- Structural engineering costs

## TERMS AND CONDITIONS OF THE AGREEMENT

### **1 Warranty of RIAI Membership**

The architect confirms that he is a Registered Member of the Royal Institute of the Architects of Ireland.

### **2 Architect's duties**

The architect will:

Exercise reasonable skill and care on the project in accordance with the normal standards of the architect's profession, and will provide the client with the services agreed,

Not start any Work Stage without the client so requesting,

Take account of the client's budget,

Make only such alterations, additions and omissions in the agreed drawings and specifications as s/he considers in the client's interest, and inform the client of such alterations, additions, omissions and of their cost implications.

Keep the client informed of any significant increases in cost during construction

Act on the client's behalf in the matters set out in this agreement, and administer the building contract as the client's agent, while acting impartially between the client and contractor.

Advise on building status if a Protected Structure.

### **3 Client's duties**

The client will:

Provide the architect with all the information necessary to enable the appropriate design to be prepared,

Employ a contractor under a separate agreement to undertake building or other works,

Hold that contractor (and not the architect) responsible for the supervision of construction work, for the operational methods, techniques, sequence of procedures and safety precautions, for the proper execution and completion on time of the building work, for any design work the contractor undertakes, and for the remedying of defects in accordance with the terms of his contract with the client, and

Not engage anybody to do any work on the project unless the architect so agrees, as this may have implications for the building contract.

### **4 Consultants, subcontractors and suppliers**

Specialist consultants, sub-contractors or suppliers may be appointed on the architect's recommendation in relation to specialist trades and/or goods or services forming part of the building works. Where such person designs part of the work, the client shall separately engage and pay those people and shall hold them solely responsible for the performance of their design.

### **5 Inspection of building work**

During Work Stage 4 the architect will visit the site at intervals

s/he considers appropriate to the stage of construction to inspect the progress and quality of the work and to determine that the work is being carried out generally in accordance with the contract documents. Frequent or constant inspection does not form part of the standard service at [A]. It is the contractor's responsibility to supervise the building work.

#### **6 Charges and costs incurred**

Where the architect is being reimbursed for costs incurred, s/he will maintain records of all such costs, and make such records available to the client on reasonable request. Invoices are to be paid no later than 28 days after they are received by the client. The architect will not start work on a Work Stage until any invoices for work on previous Work Stages have been paid in full.

## **CONTINUED**

### **7 Omitted work and Changes**

The Architect will be entitled to charge at hourly rates or at a previously agreed fee for any changes or omissions at the client's request of designs the client has previously approved or if the scope of the project increases substantially from that previously agreed. The hourly rate for these services is detailed at [B]

### **8 Architect's Liability**

The architect's liability shall extend:

to a term of six years beginning on (a) the architect's issue of the Certificate of Practical Completion under the building contract, (b) the conclusion of the service or (c) the termination of the commission as the circumstances dictate, and the architect's liability shall terminate as soon as any one of these terms has expired; and to the cost of making good any construction defects which are established as being caused by the architect's negligence or breach of contract, but not to the cost of making good any loss consequential on such defects.

### **9 Copyright**

Copyright in all drawings and documents prepared by the architect and in any work carried out from those documents shall remain the architect's property. The architect grants the client a license to use, for this project only, the designs which the client has commissioned, provided that the charges to the appropriate Work Stage have been paid by the client.

### **10 Architect's Right to Photograph the Work**

The architect or person(s) employed or engaged by the architect, without compensation or consideration have right to take photographs at the project site of both completed work and work in progress, for purposes including, but not limited to, publication in newspapers, magazines, and other print media, use in broadcast media, publication via the Internet, and use in marketing materials used by the architect. Such photographs and any accompanying descriptions shall not identify the Owner or the property address of the project without the express written consent of Owner.

### **11 Suspension and termination**

- The client may suspend the architect's performance of any or all of the agreed services, and either party may terminate the architect's appointment, on the expiry of reasonable notice given in writing.

On suspension or termination of the architect's appointment, s/he will be entitled to be paid for all work completed up to that time. Where the client suspends or terminates the appointment, the architect will be entitled to an allowance for loss of profit, to be one-tenth of the agreed amount which would have been charged had the architect been retained for the following Work Stage.

### **12 Disputes**

The client and the architect agree to seek to amicably resolve any disputes or misunderstandings between them. They note the informal mediation services which the RIAI may provide in this regard.

Any dispute as to the proper interpretation of this document may, by agreement between the client and the architect, be referred to the President of the RIAI or to the President's

nominee for a ruling, provided that such a ruling is sought on a joint statement of undisputed facts and the parties undertake to accept the ruling as final and binding.

Adapted from the RIAI Agreement between Client and  
Architect for Domestic Work (2013 Edition)

If you've enjoyed this book, a short review on Amazon would be greatly appreciated.

For more information visit  
[www.MarkStephensArchitects.com](http://www.MarkStephensArchitects.com)

## About the Author



Mark Stephens is a UK and Ireland trained Chartered and Registered Architect with the ARB, RIBA and RIAI. He is also a Certified European Passivhaus Designer and Conservation Architect Accredited with the RIAI.

With a business background in several sectors (as well as architecture) and experience of working in small and large architectural practices in London and the Caribbean he now runs an architectural practice from the West of Ireland where he specialises in predominantly design-led residential projects for discerning clients using Vectorworks as his CAD/BIM software of choice.

Mark is also an ex-Ironman triathlete, Master Scuba Diver and Gran Fondo Sportive rider.

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