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Taking Mentorship Outside the Office



Lance Rothstein, AIA and Mostafa Khard recently sat down with the Collaborative's Stewart Scott to talk about volunteering to provide cost estimating for a feasibility study to renovate a building at the Friends Center. Volunteering was an extension of their mentorship experience at [Hill International Inc.](#), where Lance is a Vice President and Mostafa is a Project Architect.

What was the impact of this project for you both personally?

Mostafa Khard: It meant a lot to me because after living in

Philadelphia for the last four years, I hadn't been involved in any community service. So this was a very good chance for me to do something for the community I'm living in, especially something that I'm really passionate about: architecture and the construction industry.

Lance Rothstein: It was actually my first project too, as far as being a volunteer on the design side. I've been participating in the Design Review Committee for years and have been providing my input that way. So, it was interesting to be the one doing the work for a change. There's a lot of effort involved in one of these projects. I always knew that, but I experienced it firsthand.

One of the things the Collaborative does is track the hours everybody is spending so they can say what number of consultant hours were donated. I don't think people fully appreciate the total number of hours that are being poured in from volunteers on all these projects. It's astounding!

"This was a very good chance for me to do something for the community I'm living in, especially something that I'm really passionate about: architecture and the construction industry." - *Mostafa Khard*

What did you do as part of the volunteer team?

Lance: Mostafa and I are both trained as architects. I was really in more of an oversight role and he was the one doing all the work. But it wasn't just about cost estimating. Mostafa wanted to be part of the whole design process and help the team figure out the phasing on top of all that. So, it wasn't just, Hill is here to be the cost estimator. We did that, but I think you [turns to Mostafa] also got a good chance to help with the design process.

Mostafa: I helped with the brainstorming sessions along with the design team and was involved in all the architectural services in the beginning of the project. In fact, I was one of the people who submitted an option early on, though it wasn't the one we chose

to continue with. I also was responsible for the cost estimate and developed cost comparisons for various elements and design options. Finally, I helped with the phasing plan of the project.

Lance: Didn't you draw the phasing diagrams?

Mostafa: Yes.

Lance: So, the Collaborative's Leverage event was coming up and recent design teams were producing the boards for their projects. I just saw the board that was produced by the design side of our team and featured prominently on that board are your phasing diagrams! So, what's cool is you were able to do more than just be the cost estimator.

What did you learn from the rest of the volunteer team?

Mostafa: It was a good experience for me, seeing all the disciplines sitting together and talking and attacking the problem together. It's a little bit different than what I was used to back home. Where I come from, Saudi Arabia, basically the architects do the design and then they send it to the engineers, and they try to fit their stuff in. But in this project, we all talked together as a team.

Lance: In the project management world and in the design world, we call that Integrated Project Delivery (IPD). That's the direction that the world is heading. In my younger days, IPD was something that was new—the idea of bringing all the disciplines together. That is very much something that the Community Design Collaborative has been doing for years, bringing the whole team together and having them at the same table. That's great.

"Integrated Project Delivery is the direction that the world is heading... and that is something that the Community Design Collaborative has been doing for years, bringing the whole team together and having them at the same table." - Lance Rothstein, AIA

Mostafa: Absolutely. Especially when it came to [building] codes. I never practiced designing here in Philly, so it was a very good chance to see the codes that apply to the city. Looking into that with the architect and the engineer, it was something that benefitted me a lot. There was a mechanical engineer, an architect, and a cost estimator, so it was a good chance for me to experience and a part of the whole process.

What do you think they learned from you?

Lance: We're the bad boys in this situation because we're putting together the piece of paper with all the numbers on it. So, the design team goes to town, and they get all these good ideas going. But then they have to put them to paper, and then we have to say, "Well, it's going to cost this much." You want it to be accurate and, in the same breath, you don't want it to be so high that the client is just going to tuck their tails and say, "We can't do this".

To me, the whole challenge here was "Wow, are they going to be able to do this?" And then breaking it down enough so that ultimately if they can't do it all at once, they can do some of it. Or they have the ability to phase the work as they raise the money.

Mostafa: Also, I talked very holistically and big picture, but we had a lot of very specific input. For example, we did an analysis of using LEDS instead of fluorescent. I didn't really have the experience or the knowledge about it, but I had the chance to do some research and talk to people to then get a conclusion.

Lance: The common conception is if you switch to LED, you spend more money. Because of Hill's experience on a bunch of projects we were able to go to other professionals in our office and say, "Here's what we're thinking, help us put together a cost comparison."

Turns out, they were very, very close in terms of cost, and that surprised a lot of people, both on the Friends Center and on the design team side. But the reality is that the output of an LED fixture is so much brighter with the modern technologies today that you can actually buy fewer fixtures. Even though you might be paying more for a fixture, you get to buy fewer of them, so they balance. And you add on top of that the operating savings over time, it was a no-brainer.

Do you have anything to say about Lance, Mostafa?

Mostafa: He's a very supportive supervisor. He's very resourceful and even if he doesn't have the answer for me he can guide me to who I can talk to. He was actually the one who initiated the idea for me to join the Collaborative team and work on this project.

Lance and Mostafa volunteered for 1520 Race Street: A Feasibility Study for Renovation for the Friends Center Corporation. [Learn more](#) about the project and volunteer team.