

**THE ULTIMATE
HIRING RESOURCES
PACK FOR
ARCHITECTURE
AND INTERIOR DESIGN
FIRM OWNERS**



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Securing Architecture and Interior Design talent in a competitive market can be challenging.

How do you ensure the person you pick will not only have the right aptitude to deliver client briefs, but also fit in with the overall culture of your practice?


And if you do manage to attract the perfect candidate, is there a way to increase your chances they'll stay?

This functional resource pack has been developed to assist you in all of these important areas so you can be confident you can spot and select the best talent for your firm during your recruitment search.

The pack includes the following key assets:

1. Salary survey
2. Position description guide
3. Interview guide
4. Onboarding guide
5. Exit interview questions guide

Let's start with the *Salary Survey*.



2019 **ARCHITECTURE** **AND INTERIOR** **DESIGN** **SALARY SURVEY**



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2019 SALARY SURVEY FOREWORD

2018 was a big year for the Architecture and Interior Design industry, with many global trends (such as data led design and sustainability) influencing the Australian market, and homegrown Australian talent unveiling some stunningly unique designs.

And 2019 is set to be just as exciting.

According to a report by [Core Logic](#), the value of new projects added to the pipeline hit a historic high of \$35bn in February 2019, and in March, a mini infrastructure boom fuelled Australia's construction pipeline. Projects moving into construction remains subdued at approximately 50% of the 5-year median in terms of both number and value.

In NSW, growth of jobs and salaries are set to continue in 2019 and beyond, largely due to a host of long-term infrastructure projects around the city.

New key projects include [Liverpool City Council's Woodward Place](#), Waverley Council's [revised design by Tonkin Zulaikha Greer](#) for the \$26.7 million restoration of Bondi Pavilion, and Lahey Constructions appointment to deliver stage 2 of [Charles Sturt University's](#) Port Macquarie Campus.

In hospitality development news, [Zhengde](#) has resubmitted plans for a 3.5/4 star hotel in Redfern, and [Cromwell's Vibe Hotel](#) project in Chatswood has been granted development approval by the Sydney North Planning Panel. The new \$75 million tower complex will comprise a 4.5 star, 156 room hotel and plaza and 2,800sq m of office space.

In fact, the hospitality sector is set to grow in Sydney.

In 2017, 8.8 million people visited Australia from overseas, a 6.6% increase on the previous year. With Australia's tourism market booming, new infrastructure and amenities will be required to match demand. It's estimated that about 4600 hotel rooms will be added to the Sydney hotel market by the end of 2022, which is expected to ease robust occupancy levels temporarily after years of escalating demand.

This increase in tourism and hotel rooms must also be coupled with an increase in tourism facilities such as attractions, restaurants and bars. This should create a very active market for candidates looking for work.

[Logos Property Group](#) has also acquired land adjacent to its Prestons Logistics Estate for the development of a new 14,800sq m logistics facility for Toll Group and [CPB Contractors](#) has been awarded the contract for the \$118.9 million Northern Road Upgrade Stage 6.

[Development of the rail network](#) is also set to have a huge impact on job availability across the city of Sydney. Aside from station design, these projects will provide even more opportunity for Architects and Interior Designers in Sydney. With each new development, comes an increased population and the need for a range of new amenities such as restaurants, bars, retail and public use areas.

As a result of all of this development, the Architecture and Interior Design market is expected to increase by around 9000 openings over the next few years.

As was the case in 2018, in 2019 and beyond we expect the demand for Revit or ArchiCAD literate Architectural Assistants/Technicians to increase further. As many candidates are not receiving 'on the job' training in this area, those with this experience can expect a slight increase in salaries offered and significantly greater job opportunities.

Likewise, experienced Graduate Architects and Interior Designers will be in demand for 2019. In particular, those who are capable of autonomous work and have worked on mixed-use projects of reasonable scale will be highly sought-after.

The Architecture and Interior Design industry is a 'high-calibre' candidate short market. This means hiring managers will need to pay well to attract and retain the best candidates. Firms offering a positive work-life balance and degree of flexibility will be highly attractive to candidates in 2019.

Based on the jobs growth, increasing job advertising trends, and increased hiring intentions we are hearing from our non-residential clients, we are expecting increased pressure on salaries throughout 2019/2020. If you need the right team to help you grow your organisation, or perhaps you are considering your own career, then don't hesitate to get in contact and together we can talk about how Kappa Executive Search can help.

ARCHITECTURE

Architectural Assistant	Average Lowest	Average Highest
0-5 Years (Revit or ArchiCAD Literate)	\$51,342	\$73,182
5-10 Years (Revit or ArchiCAD Literate)	\$71,113	\$89,423
Graduate with Bachelor/Masters of Architecture	Average Lowest	Average Highest
0-3 Years (Revit or ArchiCAD Literate)	\$50,954	\$63,283
3-5 Years (Revit or ArchiCAD Literate)	\$77,375	\$83,661
Project Professional	Average Lowest	Average Highest
6-10 Years (Revit or ArchiCAD Literate)	\$79,941	\$98,654
10+ Years (Revit or ArchiCAD Literate)	\$97,190	\$122,102
Project Leader/Associate	Average Lowest	Average Highest
(Revit or ArchiCAD Literate)	\$111,403	\$143,425
Associate Director	Average Lowest	Average Highest
	\$117,849	\$168,514
Director	Average Lowest	Average Highest
	\$146,406	\$242,791

INTERIOR DESIGN

Graduate Interior Designer	Average Lowest	Average Highest
0-3 Years	\$46,789	\$66,776
3-5 Years	\$62,335	\$81,875
Senior Interior Designer	Average Lowest	Average Highest
5-10 Years	\$74,987	\$103,897
10+ Years	\$97,900	\$113,754
Associate Interior Designer	Average Lowest	Average Highest
	\$103,504	\$132,464
Associate Director	Average Lowest	Average Highest
	\$128,472	\$178,574
Principal	Average Lowest	Average Highest
	\$153,100+	

THE ARCHITECTURE AND INTERIOR DESIGN GUIDE TO WRITING THE PERFECT POSITION DESCRIPTION



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The next - and perhaps most important - part of your recruitment campaign is developing your role's position description (PD).

This company document dives deep into your job's details covering important information such as:

- 🎨 Job title
- 🎨 Job summary
- 🎨 Company culture
- 🎨 Requirements & responsibilities

It's imperative to capture these details accurately so your PD can assist you in attracting the most qualified candidates.

Your PD can also be used to:

Help you quickly sift through applicants - Cross-check each applicant's resume with your PD to identify their degree of suitability for the role. You can then focus your time on only selecting the most relevant applicants.

Set clear expectations - Candidates are left in no doubt about what is required from your role.

Structure your interview - Your PD easily identifies the job's top selling features so you can build your interview around them. You can also use it to plan what questions to ask applicants.

For performance reviews - Use your PD reflectively. After your new recruit has been with your firm for some time, use it to evaluate their performance. It's a quick way to spot over (or under) performance.

As you can see, developing a compelling PD is great way to not only help guide your recruitment campaign, but also attract the right talent. Let's now turn to what to include in each section within your PD.

1

POSITION TITLE

Your PD's position title is the first thing an applicant sees so it's vital it accurately reflects your job's roles, responsibilities, experience level and specialisations (if any). Avoid using lengthy phrases or internal acronyms that are not standard within the Interior Design and Architecture industry. Instead, aim for clarity, accuracy and brevity.

Some appropriate Architect or Interior Design position titles might be:

- 🎨 Interior Design Architect or Project Architect
- 🎨 Project Coordinator
- 🎨 Architectural Assistant
- 🎨 Architect Technician

2

POSITION TEAM OR DEPARTMENT

Depending on your company structure and size, this section may not be appropriate for every Architect or Interior Design job. If you deem it relevant, it will help give applicants a well-rounded picture of the position.

Consider including:

1. Who they report to
2. Naming the team/department they belong to
3. How many colleagues they have in their design/architectural team

3

COMPANY'S CULTURE, MISSION OR CORE VALUES

Culture fit is arguably [one of the most important factors](#) employees consider when taking on a role, particularly when it comes to whether they stay or leave. Often overlooked, including a culture-based statement in your PD will help a candidate identify alignment between your values and their own, which is important for long-term retention.

You can opt to go detailed here, or provide just a few sentences about your work culture. The following are two examples:

A prestigious Architecture and Interior Design firm who are an industry leader in hospitality, leisure and retail. Based in a luxurious central Sydney studio, this multi-disciplinary firm offers a positive, welcoming and social environment and a strong work life balance, flexible working and regular social and team activities.

This studio offers a very inclusive and supportive culture, and places emphasis on promoting staff from within, providing real and proven opportunities for long-term career development.





4

POSITION STATEMENT / SUMMARY / BRIEF DESCRIPTION

The position statement, also known as the position summary or description, is an expanded version of the job title.

One way to formulate this crucial part of your PD is to think of it as an elevator pitch to a potential client. What are the key points you want to get across to an applicant to help them decide if your firm is a good fit?

Your summary might include the major responsibilities associated with the job, where the role sits in the greater firm, location, plus job expectations. For example, an Architect position statement may read:

Based in metropolitan Sydney, you'll work closely with the project leader on a range of hospitality and retail projects - from concept & pitch right through to project delivery – with a strong emphasis on front end design development and space planning. Whilst this role will rely heavily on your creativity, your strong technical Revit skills will also be well utilised.

EXTRA TIP

You might like to include here any progression opportunities within your firm. This will show applicants how they can grow with your company and the impact they can make, both of which are very enticing and great for retention.

5

RESPONSIBILITIES

Applicants will hone in on this section to discover what the job entails on a day-to-day basis.

Write a detailed but concise bullet point list of core responsibilities, including all major activities incumbent in the job.

As an example, here's what an appropriate responsibilities section might look like for a Senior Architect/Studio Manager:

Your responsibilities will include:

- *Taking projects from early concept design through to DA & tender stages*
- *Developing concept & design ideas with a strong focus on green building values*
- *Liaising with all external parties including clients, consultants & various councils etc*
- *Managing & mentoring a team of three designers*
- *Attending regular executive meetings to report on team progress*

6

SKILLS / EXPERIENCE / QUALIFICATIONS / REQUIREMENTS

When creating a compelling PD, it's important to list the requirements of the job role so applicants understand the level of skill demanded. For example, your firm may require Architects to be conversant in a range of software programs including Revit and CAD.

List the minimum and preferred skills, experience and/or qualifications you require. This needn't be a comprehensive list as that may overwhelm and scare potential candidates away. Instead, focus on the key 'must haves'.

An example for an Architect position:

- *ArchiCAD or Revit skills*
- *Large scale multi-story & mixed-use project experience*
- *Solid technical knowledge*
- *Excellent communication skills*
- *Leadership experience*
- *The desire to mentor & develop younger team members*
- *NSW Architect registration*
- *Willingness to travel within 100km radius*



7

BENEFITS

All applicants are keen to discover what exciting opportunities and benefits your firm offers. It's important you highlight what makes your company and role unique, and why they should choose to apply for your job over others.

There are ample opportunities to list benefits throughout the PD. One example might be in the responsibilities section where you could state *"Develop and expand your leadership skills by mentoring a team of three Graduate Architects"*.

Or you could choose to feature a standalone 'benefits' section. Some examples of statements you might like to use:

"Long-term career focus with opportunity to move between different types of projects within the firm"

"Training and development opportunities both in-house and externally"

"Six monthly reviews incorporating pay reviews & future goal setting"

"Mentorship opportunities"

"Chance to move laterally within the firm"

"Personalised professional development plan, reviewed annually"

8

BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER

While it might seem like an onerous task, taking the time to write a great PD will bring you great rewards, most certainly in the form of top Architecture and Interior Design talent!

You can use it through every stage of the hiring process to sell potential candidates on the benefits of your firm. From writing your job ad, to interviewing, to your new hire's first day on the job, your PD will save you time and effort finding the right person for the position.

Should you need some extra assistance in crafting the perfect job PD and related job ad, feel free to [contact us](#). We'd be happy to share our expertise and tips in using your PD to craft an enticing job ad and invite some exciting Architecture and Interior Design talent to apply in the process.

Next up in the *Ultimate Hiring Resource Pack* is the all-important *Interview Guide*.

A grayscale photograph of a man with light-colored hair and a beard, wearing a dark sweater over a collared shirt. He is leaning over a large sheet of paper, holding a pen and appearing to be drawing or writing. The background is blurred, showing what looks like an office or studio environment.

THE INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR EMPLOYERS SEEKING ARCHITECTS AND INTERIOR DESIGNERS



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Now that you have your perfect PD, it's time to turn your attention to the next crucial component of your recruiting campaign – your interviews.

Candidate interviews are the ideal way to determine the best applicant fit for your firm. Getting it wrong at this crucial stage can be costly - in time and money - so that's why it's vital you prepare well and carefully craft your interview questions.

The first step in this process requires you to do two key things:

1. Gather your recruitment team & review your PD - All those present at interviews should know your PD inside and out. This way, everyone is on the same page when it comes to spotting applicants with the requisite skills, qualifications and desired attributes.

2. Research each applicant - Delve deeply into each applicant's resume, portfolio (if they submitted one with their application) and professional profiles such as LinkedIn or websites.

All of these will give you a solid foundation concerning the person you are due to meet. They can also act as a springboard for creating individual questions for particular candidates. **An example:** an applicant might have experience in a large-scale development situated in a remote location that presented unique Architecture or Interior Design challenges. This piques your interest and warrants further exploration during the interview with some specific questioning.

Once you have completed those steps, you can turn to compiling the questions themselves. The following are a broad selection of some of the best Architecture and Interior Design interview questions. Feel free to select a few from each category that cater to your firm and specific role (ie Graduate, Lead Interior Designer, Studio Manager etc).

There is no need to use the entire list as that would result in excessively lengthy interviews (and overwhelmed candidates!).



ICE-BREAKER QUESTIONS

Tell us about yourself

PURPOSE

This open-ended question is designed to put candidates at ease, establishing the interview as conversation, not an interrogation. As it's quite a common question, it's likely the interviewee will have an answer prepared, but this is a good confidence boost when they are nervous.

Why are you interested in this particular role with us?

PURPOSE

The way the candidate answers this question will demonstrate whether or not they've done their research on your firm. If they haven't, that doesn't bode well for their chances at securing the job!

Why are you moving on from your current role?

PURPOSE

This is a good way to find out what the interviewee desires from your firm. They will likely frame their answer to speak about what they are looking for now that they don't get from their current job. Perhaps it might be increased personal and professional development opportunities or better working conditions.



PERSONAL & SKILLS DEVELOPMENT QUESTIONS

Think back to a day when you came home from work very happy or satisfied. What did you do that day to make you feel that way?

PURPOSE

Uncovering what drives an employee intrinsically is extremely valuable in determining a culture fit for your firm, but also for long-term retention. Based on their answer, does your firm foster an environment that will make them happy?

Tell us the most recent skill you learnt (can be work-related or not)?

Then follow this up with:

Is there further training you'd like to do to increase your skills and knowledge? If so, what?

PURPOSE

Architects and Interior Design professionals must keep up to date to remain relevant. Green design, tech advances and an ever-changing offering of new materials are a few vital areas. Candidates should answer both questions in a way that reflects their desire to continue to learn. Bonus points if they can articulate how they have researched and used a new design methodology in their work.

Can you recall an occasion where you didn't see eye to eye with a teammate and how you resolved that?

PURPOSE

This question speaks directly to their ability to be a team-player and resolve inevitable points of contention in a reasonable and constructive manner. The example they choose is also very telling. Do they pick a conflict that has a sound basis? Or is it something trivial that may reveal a weakness in their judgement?

What do you think you do really well? And not so well?

PURPOSE

A variation on ‘what is your greatest strength and weakness?’, this should give you insight into what the applicant values most about themselves work-wise. If they incorporate some of the most important skills needed in your job, all the better.

As for weaknesses, at best, their answer should give you a good indication of their ability to self-reflect and learn. At worst, it may send up a red flag i.e. an Architect candidate who feels they aren’t good at being organised!

Is there a particular Architect or Interior Designer who inspires you? Why?

PURPOSE

This question should spark a passionate response. Most Architects or Interior Design professionals can name at least one person who has influenced their work for the better. Look for a candidate that can eloquently offer the ‘who’ and ‘why’ when answering this question.

Which project are you most proud of in your portfolio and why?

PURPOSE

The choice of project and the elements that underpin its success should be a very accurate reflection of the interviewee’s values, abilities and strengths. Do they match up with those needed at your firm ie highly organised or collaborative?



JOB-SPECIFIC QUESTIONS

Imagine a client shows you a magazine picture and asks you to design their home, room for room. How would you respond?

PURPOSE

The answer to this question should clearly demonstrate how well the applicant can negotiate, persuade and dissuade – all essential elements when dealing with clients!

If you need to complete an Architecture or Interior Design job and you lack experience in that area, what would you do?

Most of us have come up against problems when coordinating different parties during a construction project. What did you do to overcome yours?

Can you provide an example of a creative idea you had that resulted in an improvement?

PURPOSE

All of these questions are aimed at uncovering an interviewee’s organisational, conflict-resolution and time-management skills – all crucial attributes. As they are all example-based responses, you should receive a wide-range of answers and hopefully, hear some innovative ideas.



TECHNICAL QUESTIONS

Talk us through the steps you take when you are first given a project

PURPOSE

Project planning is an essential tool in any Architect or Interior Designer's toolbox. Those candidates that can clearly explain a logical project planning sequence - and properly identify priorities - are the ones you want for your firm.

For Architects and Interior Designers, there is often a struggle to balance function with aesthetic appeal. How do you do that?

PURPOSE

This can be a tricky question to answer so let applicants know they can have some thinking time to formulate their response. When they do, what they say should first obviously illustrate they understand what you mean by the terms 'function' and 'aesthetics'. Next, consider what value their place on their ideas versus the clients', and whether this will work for your firm.

Do you have a solid understanding of the Building Code of Australia (BCA)?

Can you rate your Revit/AutoCAD/Sketchup skills on a scale of 1-10?

PURPOSE

The answers given here are purely to enable you to 'tick the boxes' to ensure applicants have the required technical skills for your role.



GOALS & CONCLUDING QUESTIONS

Let's fast-forward 5 years – what would you like to be doing?

PURPOSE

Knowing where your potential employee wants to go in the future is vital, particularly in determining if your firm can support them in this growth. Is there alignment between your future goals and theirs?

Do you have any questions for us?

PURPOSE

Journalists always leave this question for last as it has the potential to be the most revealing. Allowing the interview subject free rein to explore issues that are most important to them can offer up some interesting insights into their core personality and future aspirations. It's then up to you to decide if they are a good fit for your role.

EXTRA TIPS FOR CONDUCTING INTERVIEWS

Now that you're armed with some great questions, it's worth spending some time honing your interview skills. The most important skill to develop – and the one that will increase your chances of finding the best candidate – is that of active listening.

Active listening involves displaying characteristics, both verbal and non-verbal, that show the interviewee you aren't just passively taking in what they are saying. Rather, you are absorbing and seeking to understand more. An example:

PASSIVE

"Yes, I hear what you are saying but I'm not really engaging with you. I'm just waiting for my turn to talk."

ACTIVE

"My body language and words tell you I'm right there with you, fully focused on what you are trying to tell me."

Here are seven tips to help you develop your active listening skills:

1. Set up the interview room to make it conducive to active listening

It's imperative you give the interviewee your undivided attention. It's very easy to get distracted by a text message or email notification so switch your phone to silent, and shut down your email and messaging systems on your computer. If you need to keep in contact with the firm, check and respond to urgent queries between interviews. It's also a good idea to choose an interview room with good sound proofing, or one that is least likely to suffer from staff interruptions.

2. Engage with your eyes AND body

What you say non-verbally holds just as much weight as the words you speak. A slight frown, the set of your mouth or a slump in your shoulders may make the interviewee feel you're bored, frustrated or irritated.

Non-verbal signals are also a way to feed back to the interviewee that you understand what they are trying to convey. Back up what you are saying with natural eye contact and positive body language such as nodding, angling your body in their direction and smiling.

3. Talk less

It can be very easy to over-talk - rather than actively listen - about the role you have on offer. You love your firm and the work you do so that's only natural. But knowing when to talk and when to listen is a crucial component of active listening. After all, the more you talk, the less you learn. The whole point of an interview is discovery, so it makes sense you will achieve this if you talk less.

Developing the skill of effectively silencing yourself takes just as much practice as that of becoming a great speaker. Striking the balance between giving the candidate enough prompts to talk freely, and coming across as abrupt, is difficult. But with time, you can improve this skill and put it to good use during the interview process.

A few suggestions:

- 🌈 **Employ the 80/20 rule.** Let the candidate speak 80% of the time, you the remaining 20%.
- 🌈 **Use open-ended questions.** For example, the question “Do you consider yourself a leader?” will likely elicit a short reply. But “Tell me about a time when you had to lead your team in a different direction” should get the candidate talking in more detail, allowing you to remain quiet and actively listen.
- 🌈 **Practise.** Find opportunities to enhance your listening abilities. Employing it around the dinner table may be an interesting - and valuable - place to start!

4. Activate your listening time

When the candidate is talking, you must listen and absorb. But it's all too easy to get distracted by what you want to say next.

Persistently doing this means you may miss golden opportunities to ask follow-up questions. You may even miss crucial information that results in a misunderstanding about what an interviewee is trying to convey. Both of these outcomes are dire in this pivotal stage of hiring.

It takes an ordinate amount of concentration and discipline to actively listen to someone. To illustrate this, the next time you're in a meeting listening to someone speak, pay attention to how much effort it takes to continue to attend to what they are saying. Take particular note when you find your mind drifting, or you begin fidgeting, discreetly checking your email or phone, or mentally rehearsing what you want to say next. It will likely happen much faster than you might think!

5. Don't interrupt or 'sentence-steal'

When an interviewee is responding to a question, avoid jumping in and interrupting or 'sentence stealing' (where you finish the interviewee's sentence for them).

Interrupting or 'sentence-stealing' conveys a number of negative messages to the potential recruit, such as:

“I'm more important than you are”

“What I have to say is more interesting or relevant”

“I don't have time for your opinion”

It's easy to fall into this habit for a few reasons - perhaps you want talk as you don't want to risk losing your train of thought while waiting for the other person to finish. Or you may be conscious of staying on time, particularly as you will likely have many more interviews to get through.

If you're worried about forgetting, keep a notepad handy and jot down any follow-up questions that come to mind so you can let them finish their answer without cutting them off.

Should you run over time, let the candidate know in-between questions. Be honest with them about needing to wrap up soon.

6. Ensure you fully understand the interviewee's answer

It's very easy to make snap judgments about a person based on what they are saying. Our personal belief system will often cloud our judgement and misinterpret the meaning behind what is being said.

This is why clarifying questions are an important active listening technique. If the candidate says something that seems odd or unexpected, ask them to elaborate on their answer to ensure you are clear on what they are saying.

For example, *"Can we go back to what you said about XXX for minute. Can you tell me again what you meant?"*

Another technique is to paraphrase their answer by saying *"So I think this is what you're saying Am I correct?"* This gives them ample opportunity to restate to ensure their meaning gets across.

7. Summarise and reflect back

Another important way to show the listener you have been active listening is to summarise their point and repeat it back to them. It also gives them the chance to correct you if you got it wrong, or perhaps add another little nugget of information they may have forgotten.

There's no need to do this after every question, just the most important ones. Or you might like to sum up the main points at the end of the interview. Ensure you ask the interviewee if you got it right, or if there is anything else they may wish to add.

8. Follow-up after applications and interviews

So you've managed to get through the interviews with your very successful set of bespoke questions and your active listening skills. Your recruitment team has taken some time to review all candidates and you're ready for the next steps.

Before you take those, consider this: the recruitment process is tough on candidates. They put a lot of time and effort into crafting their applicants and portfolios and it's extremely disheartening if they don't hear back from a potential employer. Worse yet, they secure an interview and then it takes forever for the employer to advise whether they were successful for the next stage.

As the Architecture and Interior Design industry is relatively small in Australia, the way you treat potential employees during recruitment may impact your reputation. The potential employee you fail to get back to could very well rise to be the head of your competition somewhere down the track. Or they could score a job at a rival firm and bad mouth you to other industry professionals or clients (you would hope they wouldn't, but it does happen).

This is why it's important to remember that while you are judging during recruitment, you are being judged too. Treat candidates the way you would like to be treated. This means getting back to them in timely manner during the application and interview stage, whether they were successful or not.

The next instalment of the *Ultimate Hiring Resource Pack* is the most essential tool for retention – your *Onboarding Guide*.



THE ESSENTIAL **ONBOARDING GUIDE** FOR ARCHITECTS AND INTERIOR DESIGNERS



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You should now be the stage where you've found *and* hired a great Architecture or Interior Design professional. While the process was likely lengthy, your firm is faced with some exciting times ahead.

Having invested so much time and effort into finding your new hire, it's important to turn your focus to what you can do to ensure you keep them. This is precisely where a great onboarding process can help, particularly when you consider what a not-so-great one can do ([US labour forces stats show around 20% of employees leave their new job in the first 45 days](#)).

This onboarding guide is a roadmap for the first four weeks of your new hire's employment. It also contains a few further suggestions beyond that time. As you read through it, keep in mind there are no hard and fast rules. Feel free to tailor it according to the individual needs of your firm and your new recruit.

1

THE WEEK PRIOR TO YOUR NEW HIRE'S ARRIVAL

There are many things you can do to internally prepare for your new hire to ensure your new employee's first day and week are all they hoped for and more.

While the following may seem like a lengthy list, remember you can use the same onboarding process for all new talent in the future (albeit with a little tweak here and there for individual needs).

SUGGESTED ACTION POINTS FOR PRIOR TO YOUR NEW HIRE'S ARRIVAL

1. Send your new starter an introductory email

Your first email should be warm and welcoming, letting them know how excited everyone at the firm is to have them on board. You can take the opportunity to introduce yourself on a personal level, as well as provide some details about their team/colleagues. Ask them if they are comfortable emailing you a small bio so that you can forward to others to 'pre-introduce' them.

In this same email, pre-empt any burning questions they'll likely have about their first day by reconfirming start date and time, and detailing any specifics they need to bring (ID, bank details and so on to fill out paperwork such as tax and super forms)







2. Introduce them to the rest of the firm via email or in person

When you receive their short bio, send out an email to all firm personnel and introduce them. Or you might find it works better for your firm to invite them in prior to their official start date to have a coffee with the team. It's an informal way to help them start forming connections, so their first day isn't as daunting.

3. Set up their workspace

It's not a good feeling to arrive at your new desk and sit there twiddling your thumbs as nothing is set up for you. To avoid this, ensure your new employee's workstation is ready to go before they arrive.

Consider things such as:

-  Desk
-  Laptop/desktop computer
-  Phone
-  Email logins
-  Connection to printers
-  Access cards

You can take it a step further by loading up time-saving tools such as hyperlinks to firm policies, procedures or any software they may use on a daily basis. If appropriate, add them to email distribution lists. You could also send them a welcome email with their first day schedule all planned out. One last suggestion is to put together a personalised kit of firm-branded materials (if you have them) such as stationary, portfolios, sketch books etc.

4. Block out a portion of your day

Even if you're not with your new hire for their entire first day, it's still a good idea to keep your day open and ensure you're accessible.

5. Consider a buddy and mentor

There are merits in having a mentor and buddy program to help a new employee transition into their role, but this depends on the size and nature of your firm. If you feel it would work, pick a mentor who is a senior firm member and a buddy who is a peer. Arrange a few meetings with each during your new employee's first week. They can then meet weekly - or whatever suits - to discuss issues that may arise and job shadow if appropriate.

6. Training schedule

Your new employee's learning curve is steep - from day to day work to policies and procedures to firm branding to client briefing. As such, it's important you spend some time thinking about all your new recruit needs to grasp over their first four weeks. Then, create a training schedule to encompass these tasks with a daily or weekly workflow (there are some further tips to help you design this in the coming sections).

7. Create a 'day one' agenda

First days are always overwhelming but you can negate this somewhat by creating a structured agenda...

2

THEIR FIRST DAY

First impressions count. What do you want your new hire to say to their family and friends when they return home after their first day? Answering this is a great way to guide you in structuring your employee's first day schedule.

The following are some tips to assist you, but adjust according to what suits your firm best.

SUGGESTED ACTION POINTS FOR THE FIRST DAY

1. Arrive an hour early to get organised

Use this time to check everything is in order, from their desk to their first day schedule to any social plans.

2. Office tour

Take your new starter around the office. Ensure your tour covers key facilities and contacts that are important for their day-to-day job.

3. Colleague and/or team introductions

How you do your introductions depends on the size and structure of your firm. If you're on the smaller side, they may have already met most of their colleagues during recruitment or at your informal coffee catch-up.

But if you are a bit bigger, they will need to do the rounds. Keep it informal and ask each firm member to briefly state who they are and what they do. The new employee can spend more time with each person later in the week so brief is best, particularly as it will be overwhelming meeting lots of new people.

4. One-on-one with you

Sit down and spend some time clarifying expectations and running through job requirements (your position description will help you here). You can also broadly introduce the firm and your particular clientele, plus attend to any housekeeping items (paperwork, leave, benefits etc.).

If you have any online documentation that would help them learn more about your firm, direct them to it so they can peruse it in their quieter moments. It may be as simple as giving them access to prior successful projects so they delve deeper into your design process.

5. Give them some time at their new desk

Let them familiarise themselves with their new workspace and computer system. This might be a good opportunity to have their peer sit with them and help them navigate through firm specific systems.

6. Something social

While onboarding is about education and compliance, personally engaging your new employee is also extremely important to start building internal relationships. Arrange a social get-together for their first day, whether it's big with all staff or small with just few direct colleagues. It might be a welcome lunch, afternoon tea or after-work 'drinks and nibbles'.



The first week is all about building relationships with firm staff and knowledge transfer. Keep a close eye on your new recruit during this time to gauge whether they are feeling overwhelmed or stressed out. If you notice this, check in with them and ask how you can help.

SUGGESTED ACTION POINTS FOR THE FIRST WEEK

1. Regular mentor and buddy time

If you've put a mentor and buddy program in place, your new employee should have adequate one-on-one time with each during their first week. Not only can they transfer knowledge, they can also touch base about how the new employee is feeling and answer questions. If your firm is on the smaller side, arrange these regular meetings with yourself or another principal Architect or Interior Designer.

2. Invite them to important firm meetings

Firm meetings are a great way to impart information to a new employee, but also help them understand work and team dynamics. They should attend such meetings from day one.

3. Meetings with other relevant stakeholders plus one client

Working in the Architecture and Interior Design space, you have many key personnel you deal with outside of your firm such as councils, surveyors, engineers and of course – and most importantly – clients! Allowing your new recruit to sit in on a meeting with each during their first week is an excellent way to build the foundation of knowledge about the way you work.

4. Systems-related training

If you have specific design tools, systems and processes, a training session in the first week is a must. While it's highly likely the new employee has experience and skills in some of these areas, it's still important for them to come to grips with the nuances of the way your firm does things. Online training materials are very helpful here, for example, short video tutorials or cheat sheets.

5. Some daily 'quiet' time

It's very easy for your new employee to feel overcome by all they have to learn. It's wise to schedule in some quiet time each day to come to grips with all the new information.

6. Your availability

Your new employee should clearly understand they can come to you with questions, and that no question is silly. Take the time to connect with them at the end of each day too, and ask how it was.

7. Payroll check

Do your due diligence when it comes to paperwork and pay. Contact all relevant departments to ensure all is on track with your new hire's information.

After their first week, your employee should have a good grasp of your firm's systems, their daily workload and have also met all key personnel. Their second and third week is about further training and strengthening relationships.

SUGGESTED ACTION POINTS FOR THE SECOND AND THIRD WEEKS

1. Style & brand induction

You have specialities and/or philosophies that make you unique. That's why clients come to you. It takes time for an employee to absorb - and then live this ethos - but it's extremely important. Ensure your new recruit has ample opportunities to develop this knowledge during their second week (and beyond).

2. Strengthen internal relationships

Continue to focus on building internal relationships. Liaising with their colleagues regularly on-the-job and small social activities are important. As an example, lunch is a great way to nurture relationships and get to know your new talent. This doesn't require you to take them out each day. It should be as simple as sitting together at the same time and chat while you eat.

3. Continue with knowledge transfer sessions

The new employee should continue with their systems training if need be, but the second week should also focus upon task-related training (for example, your preferred method of creating client briefs). Combining online and in-person teaching works well, so perhaps job shadowing in conjunction with reviewing previous client briefs.

4. Assign first tasks and deadlines

If you feel they are ready, assign their first task/s in the middle of the second week with a clear outcome and deadline.

5. Lock in an ongoing weekly review meeting

This is a perfect time to check in with the new employee, but also learn more about them personally. Set a short weekly meeting towards the end of each week to do this.

By the end of this week, most of the formal onboarding process is over. But to ensure you retain this great employee you've invested so much time and money in, it must continue in a deeper way.

SUGGESTED ACTION POINTS FOR THE FOURTH WEEK AND BEYOND

1. A comprehensive review and feedback session

At the end of their first month, schedule in a longer review meeting. It should go beyond your weekly review meetings. It's a chance to delve deeper into not only the employee's progress and happiness level, but to provide encouragement and suggestions for continued learning.

Let them know you are happy to take on feedback too from everything to do with the onboarding program to everyday processes. Fresh eyes are often the best ones to spot inefficiencies and offer up better ways of doing things you might miss.

Here are a few suggested questions:

- What are you enjoying most about your role?
- What has been the most challenging?
- Has anything surprised you about your role, colleagues, firm or company?
- Have we given you the right tools and support to get your job done?
- How are you getting along with your colleagues and/or team?
- Is there anything you're still unclear about (role, firm etc.)?
- What else can I do to help you further transition into your role?
- How have you found your training program?
- What worked well (ask for specifics)? What didn't?
- Was it long enough, too long, just right?
- Is there anything we've missed that we should provide to new employees?

2. Ongoing training

Training goes beyond the first month and should be regularly scheduled until the employee feels they have a good grasp of all they need to do their job. Then it's time to set up training to help them achieve their future career goals...

3. Develop a personal development plan

The best way to retain the amazing talent you've found is to show you are invested in them. A personal and professional development plan is a wonderful way to do this. Include a few short and long-term goals, while also identifying any onsite, offsite or online training they might need.

As you can see, there is much to do to create a valuable, efficient and effective, onboarding program for your new Architecture or Interior Design talent. But the rewards it brings your firm is happy and engaged employees who will become great ambassadors for your work and brand.

Now it's time to turn to the last instalment in the *Ultimate Hiring Resource Pack - The Exit Interview Guide*.

A grayscale photograph of a woman with long dark hair, smiling warmly. She is wearing a patterned top. In the foreground, the back of a person's head and shoulders are visible, looking towards the woman. The background is a brick wall.

THE ESSENTIAL EXIT INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR ARCHITECTS AND INTERIOR DESIGNERS



kappa
executive search

Losing Architecture or Interior Design talent is hard, particularly if it's to your competition. While the experience is disheartening and frustrating, you can still salvage valuable information through an effective employee exit interview.



WHY IS AN EXIT INTERVIEW IMPORTANT?

An exiting employee has a wealth of information about the health of your firm. Conducting a well-structured exit interview gives you the opportunity to mine this vital intel.

Use it to help you:

- 📁 Retain vital work knowledge the employee would otherwise depart with
- 📁 Improve your firm's culture
- 📁 Minimise future turnover
- 📁 Cut down on recruiting & training costs
- 📁 Work on your brand



WHEN TO CONDUCT AN EXIT INTERVIEW?

The ideal time to conduct an exit interview is at start of the employee's final week as much of the emotion surrounding handing in their resignation, or having been let go, has dissipated by this point. It's likely they will be in a more emotionally-stable place, so should provide you with honest, thus valuable, feedback.

In the same vein, avoid holding the interview on their last day as they will have disengaged by this time.





WHO SHOULD RUN THE EXIT INTERVIEW?

Direct managers are not a good choice. Choose someone who is removed from the employee's everyday work environment, someone they will see as neutral party. This will encourage them to open up and speak honestly.

Opt for someone who has seniority in the company so the employee feels their views are valued. A HR manager is good choice if you have one, but you can engage an independent external consultant (although you may have to educate them about your firm so they can ask pertinent follow-up questions).

The interviewer should also be adept at expressing empathy, while remaining respectful and diplomatic.



HOW SHOULD YOU EXECUTE AN EXIT INTERVIEW?

The key to a successful exit interview is preparation. Pick the right interviewer and schedule a face-to-face meeting with the employee (you can supplement with a follow-up written or electronic survey).

At the start, explain the process is confidential. They must understand this to encourage honest responses. It may also help if they know their feedback will be used to improve conditions for those remaining (as in all likelihood, their current work colleagues are their friends).



ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS FOR YOUR EXIT INTERVIEW

The following is a comprehensive list of questions to assist you in structuring your off-boarding interview. Don't be overly concerned with sticking hard and fast to them. It's important the interviewer goes with the flow of the conversation so it remains personal therefore, constructive.

1. What attracted you to your new job and firm?
2. What is the main reason for you leaving?
3. Before you decided to look for a new job, did you look at other opportunities here, or speak to anyone about changes that might have made you stay?
4. What have you enjoyed about working here?
5. What haven't you liked?
6. Were you satisfied with your job's:
 - salary
 - work/life balance
 - conditions such as work hours?
7. Do you feel your everyday tasks and responsibilities aligned with your expectations of what the job would be? If not, how did they differ?
8. Do you think you had enough training and support to do your job effectively?
9. Did you have access to the right resources to be able to complete your tasks?
10. Do you get enough support from your direct manager? If not, please provide some insights about what they didn't get right.
11. Do you think your efforts were recognised by your peers and management? If not, how can we improve this?
12. Did you get along with your manager and peers? If not, why?
13. What could the firm have done differently to encourage you to stay?
14. As a firm, what specific areas could we improve upon (i.e. client briefing, client experience, project management etc.)?
15. What skills or experience should we look for in a replacement?
16. Do you have any other concerns about our firm you'd like to share?
17. Would you consider returning if a position became available in the future?
18. What else do you want me/us to know?

Carefully review and then action your exiting employee's feedback. In doing this, you increase the chances that the next Architecture or Interior Design talent you secure will remain engaged and happy, allowing you to focus your efforts on growing your Interior Design firm and client base.

A FINAL WORD FOR HIRING MANAGERS

Congratulations. You've made it to the end of the *Ultimate Hiring Resource Pack for Architecture and Interior Design Firm Owners*. We hope you found it to be comprehensive guide and helpful in assisting you to recruit amazing Architecture and Interior Design professionals.

Should you need further assistance with any part of your recruitment campaign, we would [love to help](#).

ABOUT KAPPA EXECUTIVE SEARCH

Kappa Executive Search helps connect Architecture and Interior Design professionals with great career opportunities.

We always place candidates into roles with their best interests at heart and we make it our business to be your partner in growing your career over the long term. Kappa Executive Search are dedicated to the design industry with over 20 years' of specialised Architecture and Interior Design experience. We have access to some of the best jobs on the market and would love the opportunity to meet with you to discuss your career goals.

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