

THE EMERGING PROFESSIONAL

IS YOUR CAREER A JOURNEY OR A DESTINATION?

Kacie Stigliano
Specification Lighting Sales



The lighting industry—what a complex machine it is. The industry brings together artistic creativity, technical engineering, scientific aptitude and business savvy, resulting in a beautiful, functional creation. Now that we're here, how do we determine where it is we want to go? This industry offers a variety of opportunities across a wide spectrum of skillsets, and it can be tough to envision where we want to end up.

The lighting industry is unique in that most of the professionals have incredibly diverse educational backgrounds and job experiences. The multitude of firms and positions ranges from product design, project integration, controls and engineering, to design consulting and

energy management. This explosion of career paths can be traced back to the 1930s, when Richard Kelly became recognized as one of the first lighting consultants; until then, the industry had been comprised of scientists and inventors. But by the end of the 20th century, the lighting industry had become an established branch of the architectural design industry and attracted professionals with backgrounds in architecture, theatrical design, engineering and fine arts.

CONFLICTING ADVICE?

Emerging Professionals tend to have backgrounds that incorporate a focus on lighting into their education. However, it is difficult in an educational environ-

ment to convey what to expect in a particular professional workplace. The goal for a graduate is to get a job associated with the degree obtained in school, but once that goal is achieved, how does one direct one's career? As young professionals, we receive advice from different mentors and established professionals. Their advice can be contradictory, such as "Know where you want to go, and you'll get there regardless of the route you take" and "It is not the destination but the path that matters." Both approaches can be successful, but for either to work, Emerging Professionals must do all they can to learn about the opportunities the lighting industry has to offer.

In order to learn about these new opportunities, one must be involved. By attending lectures, programs, conferences, industry events and manufacturer's trips, Emerging Professionals gain exposure to established professionals' experiences, advice and particular areas of expertise. The topics at a lighting conference can be as varied as an Underwriters Laboratories representative's experience creating the UL label for the very first LED luminaire, to a lobbyist who works throughout the country to assist with legislation on lighting-related matters. There are so many industries that architectural lighting affects, and it is easy to discover new avenues to take if you are in the right place. Most lighting professionals did not start out in the positions they currently hold but

used their experiences along the way to build the platform of knowledge that they stand on today.

The cross pollination of backgrounds and experiences within the industry is what made it grow in the second half of the 20th century and what continues to make the industry more robust today. Who could be a better sales rep for a manufacturer than the engineer who designed the system? Who could better offer insight into fixture design/engineering than a lighting consultant who has dealt with all the obstacles a construction site can offer and who understands architectural intent? The possibilities of where one can go within this industry are endless.

THINK BROADLY

The challenge is to not be afraid of taking a chance. At the beginning of a career, explore different positions and roles in order to gain experience and determine what you like and do not like. As much as possible, try working on different teams and different project types. Gaining a variety of experiences will help reveal where we want to arrive, and those experiences will help get us there. As Emerging Professionals begin their careers, they should take advantage of the industry events that are available to discover new paths, perspectives or relationships that may lead to an unexpected career choice.

The EP Column addresses issues affecting younger lighting professionals and those new to the industry.

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