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Firm Invests Long-term In Top Employees

By Tim Schooley

Daniel Rothschild and Ken Doyno began their business relationship in 1988 with the idea of making collaboration and transparency focal to how their resulting firm would grow.

In 1997, they established an arrangement that enabled Doyno, a younger man by seven years, to buy a one-quarter stake in Rothschild's established firm over a three-year period.

"You know, we need to get married," Rothschild remembers saying to a younger Doyno over lunch.

Focused on architecture and urban design, Rothschild and Doyno developed a way to use sketchbooks as a communication tool to engage clients in the creative process, and to help them articulate their needs.

In 2008, after 20 years of pursuing architectural and planning work out of a small office in Regent Square, they enlisted their staff to develop a new office headquarters, renovating a former industrial garage in the Strip District into the home for Rothschild Doyno Collaborative, a new name for a changing firm.

Rothschild and Doyno also put three of its staff – Geoff Campbell, Mike Gwin, and Kate Tunney – on track to become Principals and continued an "open book" policy with their staff on the firm's finances.

"By opening up and displaying the way we operate, it gave everybody the invitation to make



Geoff Campbell

Mike Gwin

Kate Tunney

the company better," Doyno said.

"We were able to establish a unique corporate culture and placed it in the middle of the table for everyone," Rothschild said.

Rothschild and Doyno had Campbell, Gwin, and Tunney write statements about their roles as Associates, and laid out direct options for the three to buy their own minority ownership shares.

Campbell has worked on such projects as the Federal Hill townhouse project by S&A Homes on the North Side and the River's Edge in Oakmont. Gwin has worked on a variety of architectural projects, ranging from institutional to commercial clients. Tunney has

worked in the firm's urban design and master planning department.

With the firm for more than 10 years now, Tunney said she can feel the difference in being a Principal.

"It feels very natural, but I definitely feel more responsibility and dedication," she said. "I often joke that I feel like I've gotten my business degree by working in this office."

The firm is open to adding more Principals, said Rothschild, who emphasized that the transparent culture that they created is an important ingredient in the decision to name new partners.

"Without an established culture,

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the transaction becomes more financial and less meaningful,” he said.

If Rothschild Doyno’s approach seems more idealistic than practical, then consider the business results.

The firm has grown by 70 percent since 2007, with annual revenue increasing at a double-digit growth rate from \$1.66 million

to more than \$2.8 million last year in a profession that may have been the hardest hit by the difficult economy of the Great Recession.

Anne Swager, executive director of the Pittsburgh chapter of the American Institute of Architects, said succession planning is always a major challenge for architecture firms – it’s a popular subject requested for workshops

and seminars.

Rothschild Doyno’s results show the firm has taken a successful approach.

“They’ve been very deliberate for years in how they run that firm and in building their brand, and they’ve become quite successful,” Swager said.

