

RACHEL ADAMS

AIA | LEED AP

TENACITY



Rachel has twenty years of experience in delivering educational facilities throughout California. As Managing Principal for A4E, Rachel leads the practice in planning, programming, design, and management, with an emphasis on budget and schedule. As a LEED accredited Professional, Rachel has shaped the foundation of A4E's sustainable practice and delivery of innovative solutions.

"If you do your best as a human and an architect, respecting the work and the people alike, success will happen. Capital S Success is different for everyone, but the beauty of our profession is that there are a variety of pathways to get there."

HOW DID YOU DECIDE TO BECOME AN ARCHITECT?

In 7th grade I was impressed by the materials and imposing nature of the Woodruff Arts Center in Atlanta Ga. That encounter sparked a passion to pursue a career in architecture. I then tailored my school projects, research papers, and coursework to prepare for the rigors of architecture school.

CAN YOU TELL US ABOUT YOUR CAREER PATH AND THE POSITIONS YOU HAVE HELD?

After graduating from Georgia Tech in 1997 with a Bachelor of Science in Architecture. I sought to balance between theory and craft, choosing to attend The Glasgow School of Art for my Masters.

I moved to Los Angeles in 2000, beginning my career at Perkins and Will, joining their Health Care Studio as a junior staff member. However, in 2001 I transitioned to their Education Studio and discovered my deep connection to the mission behind school design.

In 2004 I seized an opportunity to join Architecture for Education (A4E), a renowned firm known for its innovative approach to designing educational spaces.

For 10 years I immersed myself into every aspect of the architectural process, growing from a job captain to project architect, then principal, and partner.

In 2017, alongside my partner Olivia Graf Doyle, I spearheaded a successful firm buyout. Fueled by our shared passion for creating educational facilities, we embarked on a journey to continue the legacy of A4E.

HAVE YOU ALWAYS WANTED TO BE IN A LEADERSHIP POSITION OR HAS THAT CHANGED OVER TIME?

I always assumed architects were self-employed or owned their own firms. Therefore, I dedicated my career to acquiring the essential skills needed to achieve that goal.

WHO DO YOU LOOK UP TO AS A LEADER AND WHY?

Anyone who does the right thing when no one is looking, and those who are willing to grapple with complex situations with no easy answers.

HOW HAVE YOU WEATHERED THE CHANGING ECONOMIC CYCLES AND RECESSIONS WITHIN THE INDUSTRY?

Having weathered multiple recessions, I prioritized becoming indispensable to my team, cultivating a diverse skill set to tackle various tasks as needed.

Now, as a firm leader my priority lies in aligning each team member's unique skills with project requirements while fostering their individual growth.

WHO MENTORED YOU / HELPED YOU ON YOUR PATH TO SUCCESS?

I've been fortunate to have had numerous mentors, whose guidance and trust have been instrumental in shaping my professional path.

Among them, Gabrielle Bullock, FAIA stands out for her unwavering perseverance in leadership, inspiring me to navigate challenges with resilience.

Additionally, Gaylaird Christopher, FAIA the founding principal of A4E, played a pivotal role by entrusting me with project leadership responsibilities and eventually the opportunity to lead the firm itself.

IS THERE ANYTHING YOU WOULD HAVE DONE DIFFERENTLY?

Lots of little things I am sure, but I only know my path and I have very few regrets.

WHAT DO YOU BELIEVE ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT QUALITIES AN ARCHITECT SHOULD HAVE?

Architects should recognize that there is always more to learn, the curiosity to seek knowledge, and the tenacity to resolve obstacles along the way.

ARE THERE ANY RESOURCES THAT YOU FOUND USEFUL REGARDING LEADERSHIP?

Attending local AIA chapter events and national AIA conferences can be an excellent strategy for leadership development. These events offer valuable opportunities to hear from a diverse range of architects, and to learn from their experiences and insights.

Experimenting with different resources and finding what resonates best with you can be a great way to continue growing and evolving as a leader.

WHAT ADVICE DO YOU WANT TO GIVE TO FUTURE LEADERS?

Recognize and balance when it's good to promote oneself and when to champion others.

Architecture is a team sport, there are so many people involved and success is built upon everyone working together.

But, to become a leader you do need to identify and promote yourself with dignity.

TIMELINE

- **1997**
Bachelor of Science
Georgia Institute of
Technology
- **1998**
Worked as intern
between Undergrad
and Gradschool
- **2000**
Master of
Architecture
Mackintosh School
of Architecture
- **2000**
Moved to LA
Began work at
Perkins & Will
- **2004**
Joined A4E as
Senior Job Captain
- **2009**
Licensed
- **2009**
AIA Pasadena
Foothill Chapter
Member
- **2013**
Promoted to A4E
Principal
- **2017**
Completed Firm
Buyout and
Transition with
Olivia Graf Doyle
- **2023**
AIA Pasadena
Foothill Chapter
President