



## HPD Architecture's Laura Davis on the keys to its growth



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When I was an intern working at the architecture office where my mentor [Holly Hall](#) worked, she came to me and [Larry Paschall](#) and told us she was stepping out on her own.

She said, "Do you guys want to come with me?" I'd only been an intern for six months when she approached me. That's a short amount of time, but she was also one of the best mentors I'd ever had, and I thought, "If I let her get away from me, I'm making a big mistake."

That motivated me to look into what she was wanting to form as far as a firm goes, and it turned out to be a good partnership in terms of the strengths of all three of us. I realized this was one of the biggest opportunities I'd ever have in my career. Even when I played devil's advocate, I realized that even if I ended up failing, I would have the benefit of learning so much. There was no downside.

This gave me the ability to launch my career in the exact direction of where I wanted to go. If I went to an established firm, I would learn how to best serve the firm's owner rather than my partners and myself.

We started the firm in 2008. At that time, I was finishing up my exams to be a professional architect. I was already in a transition part of the career in one way or another.



Laura Davis of HPD Architecture LLC

When we opened up, we realized what it means to own your own business. You have to evaluate health care plans and insurance and all those things that small business owners have to deal with, but most employees don't have to worry about.

No one really knew who HPD Architecture was, and once we got out on our own, no one was there bringing in the work. When you're out on your own, there's no rainmaker or person in the office bringing in the work. So, we said, "Now what do we do?"

We didn't even have a year into the business when Holly and Larry sat me down after I came back from maternity leave. The recession had hit and things had slowed down. They told me, "We need you to figure out what this marketing is all about."

This changed my entire focus, and I became a director of marketing. That in itself was a huge challenge. We needed to make our mark to survive.

Because I'd done a lot of internships at various firms, I learned there are certain things architects don't do. One of those is promote your business, advertise or speak in public. All those things were considered out of bounds for an architect.

When I started to get involved in the marketing, there were a lot of firms tightening up and closing some things down to ride out the storm.

Looking back, I think it was a great opportunity for us. We were so brand new, and ignorance was bliss. We didn't know what we were supposed to do and not do, and because I had never done marketing, I tried everything.

So, I Googled, "What is marketing?" and found there were a lot of opinions about marketing, but the recurring theme was that networking was an inexpensive way of getting your name out there. I went to industry happy hours, and our firm joined the Chamber of Commerce.

People started to know me as someone who could provide connections and warm introductions to people in my group.

We also host a podcast on iTunes about two architects having a couple of cocktails to come sit and talk to us. We've done this for three years and have listeners all over the U.S. and even in Greece.

We started public speaking, which has helped establish brand awareness. This was a personal challenge for me, and it was overwhelming when I first started out, but I learned to take on the activities that fulfill me and found out what I was really good at and focused on those.

In this job, what you get back is what you put into it.