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## “The Concentric Design Process” How to See a Bigger Picture

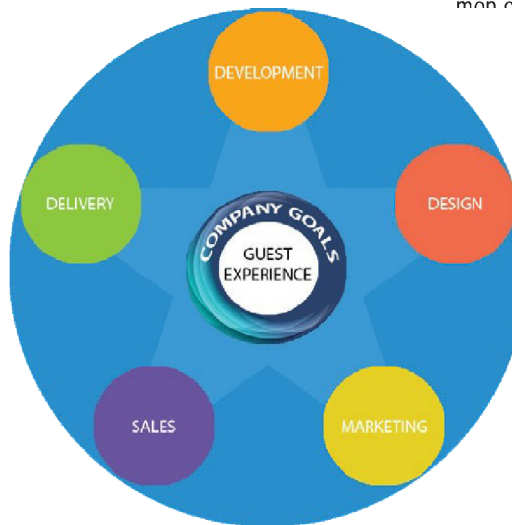
By Margit E. Whitlock, AIA

Once upon a time the world was flat. Or at least we thought so. It took brave explorers to dispel linear thinking. Once the flat world illusion was exposed, men and women circumnavigated the globe, discovering the world. Today our universe has expanded further to outer space, cyber space and exploration beyond our wildest dreams. However, for some reason, a horizontal mentality still dictates the operation of our businesses and the development process.

Think about your last hospitality design and construction challenge. Where did you start? Was it budget-driven? Was it program driven? Was it customer driven? HOA Board driven? Was it the same place as your previous deal? Will the next project be the same? Ask yourself? Is it time to make a change?

We believe the answer is yes. It is time to coordinate all the functions of hospitality, design, operations and development to offer the most comprehensive guest experience.

Today with our global community we know the planet is round; pictures are not in black and white and we all function better interacting in a community with each other. So for what was once a journey from point A to point Z, with each component being measured singularly, we now start to process a fresh way of thinking.



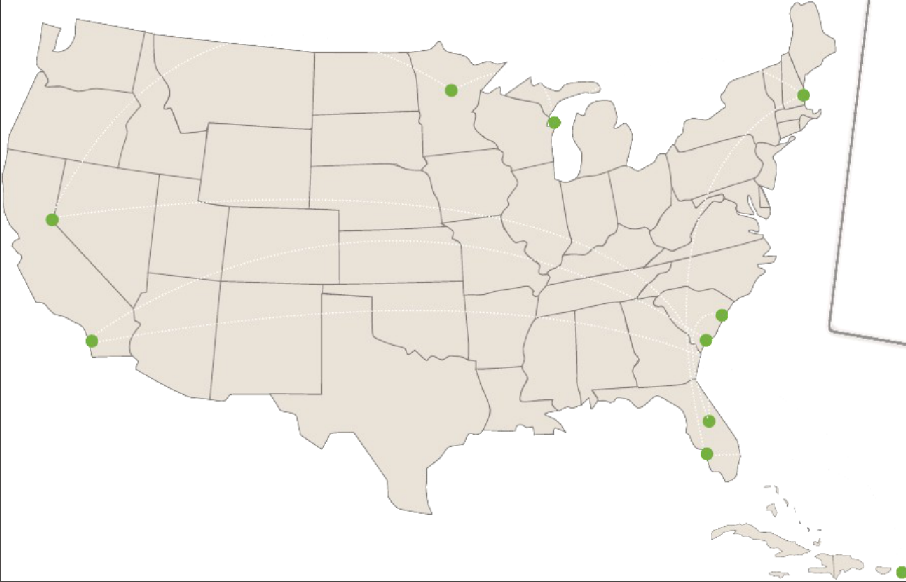
We call this the “Concentric Design Process”. The implication being that we design from a common center.

we can start from a central goal---The Guest Experience---we can build a process for development that is structured concentrically. Thus, the guest experience needs to be wrapped with your company's core principals and key departments. This concept will also establish a framework for partnership within your organization. For instance, at San Diego's Optimum Health Institute the guiding overview was to create “a safe and sacred environment promoting faith, love, healing and hope.”

Your core principals will of course be different. Perhaps “you strive to develop unique properties in unmatched location; or you will provide healthy and sustainable environments; or your goal is to create family oriented resorts at a moderate and affordable price.”

**What does this have to do with “DESIGN”?**

If we assume the very center of the hospitality core is the guest experience--- ask yourself, what



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exactly provides a unique guest experience for this property? Shelter, fun, location, community, and a place to reconnect....All of these important aspects relate to the built environment and the functionality of the indoor and outdoor spaces. Do not forget the most important touch points of a guest experience – reservations, arrival, reception/check in, circulation, living unit, amenities, as well as check out and post stay responses.

Architecture and interior design are the chief tools you have to convey the message – the promise you have made to the guest/owner. The intent is to have an integrated product, viable, marketable and deliverable.

Where do you start? Build your own hospitality “DNA” model. Here, a concentric design model is presented that better expresses the parallelism of the various development activities. Try this exercise:

Draw a circle—Guest Experience—what is it?  
 Draw another circle around this one – Company Goals – what are they?

Draw a five point star over the circles – each point represents a part of the development process:

1. Development – The Big Idea (“TBI”) – describe it;
2. Design – Market driven solutions – at all aspects of the organization;
3. Marketing – Develop and convey “TBI” based on research;
4. Sales – Offer an experience to your guests and clients, don’t sell them;
5. Delivery – Follow through on the commitment. Be the promise in all aspects of delivering “TBI.”

Next, draw a straight line to connect each point

together and then draw a circle connecting each star point. Now you have the framework.

Each step of the development process is in direct contact with the other. Each has a responsibility to the core principal with all elements touching and impacting each other.

This outlines a broad brush stroke of a very complex process. There will be many interior circles with important aspects of the development process. However, nothing is outside the circle.

When focusing Architectural Concepts work at Optimum Health Institute, we used this thinking in a workshop with key staff members and helped them develop the essence of their core principles. This gave us a game plan to enrich the environment for quiet and calm spaces planned for rest and reflection. An important component was the provision of outdoor rooms for personal and group activities devoting each area of the landscaping to the guest. There are no unusable spaces on the grounds.

Operationally this meant that the staff needed to make a commitment to maintain the grounds in superior shape and to be flexible and considerate of noise, dust and other distractions. From a management point of view this was exemplified by their acknowledgement that it takes time and money to provide an exceptional experience, but when your staff is truly committed the result is astonishing. Ownership of the company’s goals was important in achieving effective communication and input to create an environment specific to the target market.

Evolving from the static A-Z, “world is flat” thinking to the dynamic “Concentric Design Process”

is really quite simple. In your case, commit to an executive staff retreat for a day and ask some simple questions and develop your product through the results of the concentric design process.

Who are we?

What are we doing?

Where are we going?

What are we promising?

Who will buy it?

What do they want?

Continue your questions until you understand the end result.

Oh and don't forget to invite your design team!  
 Have fun.



Margit E. Whitlock AIA is a highly sought-after public speaker and panel member on topics regarding architecture, predominantly as it pertains to hospitality. She has been recruited on a national level by such organizations as the American Resort Development Association (ARDA), an international trade association with 4000 convention attendees and The National Exposition of Contract Furnishings (NEOCON) an international trade show with 40,000 attendees. She has also spoken at the Friends of Architecture in San Diego, and as far away as Miami at a Hospitality Design Boutique Show on her specialty of Sensory Perceptions and their impact on emotional branding. During her numerous speaking engagements she has focused on conceptual development, resort theming and the role of the architect. She is available to conduct workshops to create your own hospitality DNA.